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# AT FREEDOM'S DOOR



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*The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (1925, 4th edition 1948)

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*Wisdom and Waste in the Punjab Village* (1934)

# AT FREEDOM'S DOOR

BY

MALCOLM LYALL DARLING

‘ Come . . . let us go into the fields ;  
let us lodge in the villages.’



GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE  
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TO  
MY TWO COMPANIONS  
APRIL AND PAUL



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	xi
<b>PART ONE</b> <b>PESHAWAR TO DELHI</b>	
I THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER	3
II THE NORTHERN PUNJAB	34
III TO THE CHENAB AND BEYOND	65
IV ACROSS THE BEAS TO THE SUTLEJ	88
V SUTLEJ TO JUMNA	112
VI THE UNITED PROVINCES—SAHARANPUR TO DELHI	142
<b>PART TWO</b> <b>DELHI TO JUBBULPORE</b>	
VII DELHI TO AGRA	179
VIII AGRA TO JHANSI—THREE INDIAN STATES	214
IX BUNDELKHAND—JHANSI TO THE VINDHYAS	240
X THE CENTRAL PROVINCES	262
EPILOGUE	293
<b>PART THREE</b> <b>IMPRESSIONS AND REFLECTIONS</b>	
XI POLITICS	299
XII THE ADMINISTRATION	308
XIII CHANGE IN THE VILLAGE	325
APPENDIX—NOTE ON WAGES AND PRICES, 1946-7	350
GLOSSARY	353
INDEX	355



## ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATE	FACING PAGE
I	Camels fording a side-stream of the Indus 34
	Crossing the Indus : David going on board 34
II	Wayside inquiries 35
	The truck 35
	A. and P. 35
III	Spectators (p. 42) 50
	Gipsy encampment near Wah 50
IV	Veteran colonists (p. 81) 51
	Waterlogged (p. 77) 51
	The meeting on December 21 (p. 80) 51
V	Crossing the Beas 194
	A confiding hand (p. 100) 194
VI	Village interior (p. 193) 195
	Abdul Mabud Khan (p. 161) 195
	A village meeting (p. 228) 195
VII	A hospitable courtyard (p. 172) 210
	Moghul bridge at Nurabad (p. 226) 210
	A village potter 210
VIII	The sadhu (p. 289) 211
	The marble rocks 211
	Our last village (p. 291) 211

*A sketch-map showing the route is printed on the end-papers*





## INTRODUCTION

This is the story of a ride across northern India in the winter of 1946-7. The moment was a fateful one—comparable, perhaps, in historic importance with the summer of 1789 when Arthur Young set out on the third of his famous rides, across a France on the eve of revolution. The days of the British Raj were clearly numbered, but no one yet knew what would take its place. Congress demanded one thing, the Muslim League another, and both so passionately and uncompromisingly that a peaceful settlement seemed almost beyond hope. Everywhere there was talk of civil war and a sense of impending upheaval.

The burning question was Pakistan—to be or not to be. The Cabinet Delegation, which had visited India in the summer of 1946, had ruled it out and had even induced Congress and the League to agree to a single Constituent Assembly for the whole of India. But the agreement was as brittle as glass, and a thoughtless speech or two on the Congress side was enough to smash it. The subsequent creation of an interim Government from representatives of both sides had a good momentary effect, but the table at which they sat divided rather than united them. Already bloody hands were at work elsewhere. 'The great killings' in Calcutta had been followed by a massacre of Hindus in Eastern Bengal, and we had hardly reached Delhi when news came of savage reprisals in Bihar. Muslims in the Meerut District were the next victims, and the country round Delhi was only saved from serious outbreak by the prompt action of the Punjab Government and its local officials. In Delhi itself, as in other large towns, there was the constant dread of a sudden stab in the dusk or dark. Fear, hatred and lawlessness—propaganda's evil brood—were abroad, and some doubted whether a long ride would be feasible. But when the doubt was mentioned to Pundit Nehru, just back from Bihar, he scouted the idea and said that, even with things at their worst, I could have ridden

through Bihar. The anti-British feeling of the year before had given way to an orgy of communal hatred.

Nowhere was communal feeling potentially so dangerous and so complicated as in the Punjab. It was dangerous because of the Punjab's virile hot-headed people, and complicated because there was a third, and not less obstinate party—the Sikhs. Less than four million in a population of over 28 million, but more closely knit together than either Hindu or Muslim, fiercer too, and prouder and more dynamic, they feared for their very existence, since Pakistan threatened either to cut their community in two, or, as they believed, to put it for ever under the Muslim, from whom moreover they had once wrested freedom. At the moment they were comparatively dormant and the League was the more disturbing of the two. The elections in the spring had given it all but a few of the Muslim seats and made it much the largest party in the Provincial Assembly.<sup>1</sup> But, though Muslims preponderated in the Punjab, owing to weightage in favour of minorities, the party was not large enough to command a majority without the co-operation of either Hindu or Sikh.<sup>2</sup> This had been refused, and the power which the League felt was its due had been grasped by its opponents. An acute and rebellious sense of frustration followed, with the result, inevitable in India, that minds turned to civil disobedience. This was now being planned.

The position in the North-West Frontier Province was even more disturbing. Here Muslim was divided against Muslim, Congress Red Shirt against Muslim Leaguer, with the Red Shirt in power backed by Hindu and Sikh. A campaign by the League to oust them was in full swing and the massacre of Muslims in Bihar was exploited to the full. A bold but untimely visit by Pundit Nehru to the Frontier was the signal for violent demonstrations against Congress and a sharp spur, on both sides of the Frontier, to the fear of Hindu domination. Fear of domination was common to all parties. Congress feared domination by

<sup>1</sup> Total number of representatives, 175; Muslims, 86; League, 79.

<sup>2</sup> Representing 56 per cent of the population, the Muslims had only 51 per cent of the seats. Sikhs numbered 13 per cent of the population. The balance was mainly Hindu.

the British ; the League, domination by Congress ; the Sikh, domination by the League. The British alone took a big enough step to allay the fear in their case ; but that came later with Mr Attlee's announcement in February that Britain would withdraw from India not later than June 1948.

I had some idea of what the intelligentsia was thinking in this time of crisis, because the winter before I had visited almost every provincial capital on an official mission, and significantly nearly every talk on politics had turned sooner or later to the fear of anarchy or civil war. But I met almost no one who could tell me what the peasant was thinking nor even, in any detail, how his way of life had been affected by the war. Yet every Secretariat, led by New Delhi, was working out large-scale plans for improving his lot. I had long been interested in him, and before the war had done two long rides in order to learn what I could about him. Clearly there was now more than ever to learn, and to ride still seemed the best way to do it. The first two rides had been confined to the Punjab, the province where I spent most of my 36 years' service. This time I wanted a wider view. Accordingly, I decided to start at Peshawar and ride as far south as I could.

My first two rides were done in the service of Government. On this occasion I was my own master and could say and do what I liked, and those I met felt perhaps they could do the same by me. This was my one advantage, and no mean one. But the disadvantages were many. I had to make my way without the help of clerk, stenographer or orderly, without too the prestige of office, which in the East will make the crookedest ways straight. There were many arrangements to make, many things to be secured—three horses of the right type, a truck for transporting servants and kit, rations for man and beast, and accommodation at a new place almost every night—and a host of officials had to be written to on one subject or another. There were moments during the three or four weeks of preparation when I wished myself comfortably at home again ; but once in the saddle I had no regrets, so absorbing from the first was what we saw and heard.

I say 'we' because with me were my daughter and her Belgian husband, who needed holiday to remove the effects of prolonged confinement during the war in a Spanish concentration camp. My daughter had long shared my interest in the peasant, and with her knowledge of the language and ready address she proved a most useful link with the peasant women in the villages we visited. Not less useful was her almost maternal solicitude for our horses, upon whose fitness the whole tour depended. The truck was of almost equal importance, carrying as it did our whole means of living, and that it negotiated the many hundred miles of the most varied, and sometimes detestable roads without serious mishap was largely due to my son-in-law's skilled care and supervision. Indeed, without his help and my daughter's the tour could hardly have been done.

I kept a diary, of course, and have stuck to it in what follows, but have summarized my impressions in three chapters at the end. The diary form has this advantage, that fact and saying remain in their original setting and retain perhaps some touch of their original freshness. In the interest of the general reader I have freely edited and abridged what I wrote from day to day, since it was written at too much speed and pressure to be readable as it stood. But nothing has been added (or omitted) in the light of after events except here and there a point recorded by my daughter in her diary and omitted in mine. It was impossible for either of us to record everything of interest we saw and heard.

It only remains to thank the innumerable officials, high and low, more especially in the Co-operative field, for an ungrudging assistance without which the tour could hardly have been carried out. A word of special gratitude is due to Mr Guy Wint for reading my manuscript and for many helpful suggestions and to Mr Arthur Cole for reading the proofs.

**Part One**  
**PESHAWAR TO DELHI**



## Chapter I

### THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER

#### I—TO THE INDUS

*November 25—Peshawar to Utmanzai—23 miles*

‘Why do you ride on horses?’ asked a Pathan, wondering at the sight of two horsemen on the road. ‘We are returning to old times,’ replied my companion, an Inspector of Co-operative Societies; and he added, ‘the day will come when horses will be ridden again.’

‘But what are you about?’

‘We are wandering here and there,’ was the cautious reply.

Both questions were to the point, and the Pathan was not the first to put them. ‘Why on horseback? Why not in a car?’ others have asked me more than once since I landed. And almost everyone has said—‘What’s the object?’ The object is to see what is going on in the village since the war, and the goal, at present no more than a dream, is the Narbada. But, if I had said this to the Pathan, he would probably have thought me queer in the head.

We set out from the most helpful and hospitable of Government Houses as a very red sun rose above the tree-tops into a cold blue sky. No wonder we were asked why we rode on horses. We met many on donkey and camel but no horseman, though we were nearly seven hours on the road, and even my companion had not ridden for seven years. In riding suit and boots 25 years old, I felt as out of fashion as a cab-horse in London. Tongas, buses, motor cars, lorries flowed past us, intermingled with bullock carts and camel caravans from the wilds of Ghazni. The buses—fourteen of them in the eleven miles between Nahakki and Charsadda—had almost as many passengers on the roof as inside. The tongas, designed for four, carried from six to a dozen and were bowled along by ponies—one to each—who think nothing of doing the



forty miles to Charsadda and back in a day. Which recalls the way we rattled into Peshawar, 39 years ago, after a forty-mile drive to Ali Masjid and back. Amongst the motor cars was one with the Congress flag on its bonnet and two of the four Ministers inside. Hardly a car slowed down at the sight of us, but fortunately neither of the two horses I rode in turn gave them so much as a look, though one minded almost everything else from a bullock cart to a bridge. At one point, with nothing to account for it, he suddenly ducked and shot right round. Both horses are from the Remount Depot at Sargodha and only reached me two days ago after 36 hours in the train. One is a stout little grey of thirteen hands from South Africa who promises to do his continent justice. The other, a sixteen-hand bay, is all that could be desired to look at, but stumbles ominously.

My companion was much less well mounted, on a skinny little beast he kept for a trap. 'Your pony is weak,' remarked a passer-by with two or three pack ponies laden with gur; 'mine are better than yours.' 'Well then, let's exchange,' said the Inspector, and to that there was no reply. The Pathans are a cheerful people and pleasantries fly up and down the road—friendly greetings too. The horseman should greet the pedestrian first with a 'May you not be tired'; and the pedestrian replies—'May no evil befall you'; or if the answer is to a child's greeting—'May you grow up'.

A Ghiljai, seeing my horse shy at his camel, exclaimed: 'Why does his horse shy? Camels and horses should go together. But,' he added reflectively, 'Sahib's horses are educated!' The Ghiljais were much the most picturesque of our fellow-wayfarers. Every year, with the approach of winter, they leave their hills round Ghazni to work and trade in the warmer region of Peshawar. It means a month on the road, and this was their last march—a thirty-mile affair. All were on foot, except the children and a few of the older women, who, with a fowl or two, rode high on the laden camels. The women go unveiled and have a high standard of virtue, due to a lively fear of

<sup>1</sup> Unrefined sugar. The word should be noted, as it recurs frequently.

consequences, and they are so attached to their hills that they will not marry anyone in the plains. A well-placed official fell for one of their girls and sought her hand in marriage. Her father was willing, on a promise of the usual bride-price, and the girl was willing too, but on lines of her own. ‘If you marry me,’ she said, ‘I shall do my best to run away from you. If I have children by you, I shall still run away from you. If you can stand up to this, take me.’ And that was the end of the matter.

Our road is not one for the traveller after dark. Too many outlaws about, and the long riverain grass and the close-set sugar-cane give them too good a shelter. Both were pleasant to the eye, but pleasantest of all was the Chinese tallow tree with leaves red as Venetian glass. We crossed arm after arm of the Kabul river, all a grape green and still clear and fresh as in their mountain home. The mountains themselves and their snows were veiled, and so thick were the haze and dust that even the nearer hills were hidden. But what did that matter with so much beauty around us? The last of six bridges brought us to the Swat river, and a little later to Charsadda. There, with 19 miles behind us, I left the Inspector to rest his pony, and I plodded on, through more tongas than I have ever seen crowded together in a bazaar, out on to the hot dusty highway beyond. There were only three miles to go, but to both horse and rider they seemed like ten. The horse stumbled, and the rider’s back ached. At last a small hill appeared in the distance with a large square building on its summit, and a little later I rode through a gate into the barbed wire enclosure of the semi-fortified rest-house where we are staying.

I found A. and P. a little ruffled by last-minute arrangements at Peshawar and by the discomforts of a first day on the road in a congested badly-packed truck—the 30 cwt. military truck I have acquired for servants and kit. But the great thing is, we are off. At one time I doubted whether we should ever get started. When we set out from England six weeks ago, I had hopes I should be lent two Government chargers, or Boarders as they are called. But on reaching New Delhi I was greeted with an official

letter regretting that they were not available. I renewed my suit but days passed with no answer and the precious four-months cold weather began to slip away. I tried a number of horses, but for the only one that might have done I was asked considerably more than the owner had paid for it a year ago, on the curious ground that in the interval he had 'put so much into it'! The situation began to look desperate when I learnt that my appeal was with the highest military authority concerned—a tough little General, who was not one to indulge a mere civilian without strong reason—nor, fortunately, to turn him down without a hearing. When the hearing came, the reasons seemed at first as light as air in his eyes, when suddenly, as if by a miracle, I heard him promising me two Boarders as a special case. I shan't easily forget that moment. After that the other fences, harassing enough, were child's play. I had to knock at many doors for help, but at none was it denied, whether it concerned the purchase of the truck, the grant of the necessary petrol, the supply of our dues in rationed commodities for man and beast, or the securing of accommodation at rest-houses along our route.

One door might well have been closed to me. Despite his many preoccupations, Pundit Nehru was kind enough to see me and to write on my behalf to the Premiers of the three Congress Provinces through which I hoped to pass, and standing on a small table in his office in front of a vast map of India, he even took the trouble to point out possible routes through his province, the U.P. At last, with a third horse bought for P.—a problem in itself since he has never ridden—and with six servants engaged (three for the horses, two for ourselves, and one for the truck) it became possible to fix dates, but twice last-minute changes had to be made owing to the time it took to get the two Boarders to Peshawar.

### *November 26—Utmanzai to Mardan—20 miles*

I set out at 8 accompanied by the Tehsildar,<sup>1</sup> a pleasant garrulous Pathan with fine white teeth, which sprang into

<sup>1</sup> An important administrative official in charge of one of the three or more tehsils into which every district in northern India is divided.

sight with every laugh. Most obligingly, he talked almost the whole way, pouring out a stream of information and anecdote drawn from his twenty years' Government service. The first few miles took us cross-country—how much nicer than yesterday's highroad—by half-flooded tracks due to an overflowing canal. Is there any sound more agreeable on a fresh morning, with the sun just risen, than the splashing of one's horse through water? The hills were still deep in haze, but to right and left were embattled squares of ripening cane and lines of poplar and willow, their tender green touched to autumn gold. Here and there fragrant smoke rose from a grove where the cane's sweet juice was being turned into gur. We stopped to watch the fivefold process: the crushing of the cane between metal jaws, with a blue-eyed boy of only six in charge; the filtering of the juice in one pan; its boiling in another; its hardening in a third, and finally its moulding into neat little brown balls by a deft flicking of the fingers. Everyone now grows one or other of the Coimbatore canes. At first they were too hard even for Pathan teeth to chew, but with time they have become tenderer—or Pathan teeth sharper.

Before we moved on, the Tehsildar had a pull at a hookah and produced one of the few cheerful sounds made by the human mouth in the enjoyment of its pleasures. The cultivation round is done by Mohmand tribesmen, a hard-working lot brought in a generation ago when the Lower Swat canal was made. We now went to see their landlord. He was at work in his orchard, and while waiting for him we sat down on a charpoy in his courtyard. The charpoy or string bedstead binds India together as few other things do. One or more are to be found in almost every house, however poor, but there are rules as to its use. Here the guest is given one to himself, and if this is not done, it is a sign that he is not welcome. A tenant cannot sit on the same charpoy as his landlord, and in old days his charpoy had to be turned upside down. No Pathan would ever dream of sitting upon the ground itself. That is for menials.

When the landlord appeared, a man in the thirties with a reddish-brown complexion and a large mouth, he gave us

the usual warm Pathan welcome, and we settled down to an hour's talk. He was worth talking to as he had been to college and, unlike those who have 'left sickle and plough and crept within city walls',<sup>1</sup> he has always lived on his land. I forget how the conversation started, but he was soon complaining that he received no assistance from Government: good seed not to be had and no help with his fruit-growing. But surely, I said, the Government fruit farm at Tarnab has been a help. 'Tarnab is only a kind of show,' he replied. (We were talking in English which he spoke reasonably well.) 'Had Noel Sahib remained this would have been very different. He was helpful to everyone.' 'Government', commented the Tehsildar, 'is in the hand of clerks, and in nearly all the big cities these are Hindus.' The first whiff of communal feeling.

We discussed the changes that had taken place in the last twenty years. There is less litigation, said the landlord—not everyone would endorse this; his tenants take more interest in their land and now want education for their children; the cattle are stronger, and there is much less quail-, ram- and cock-fighting. On the other hand, said the Tehsildar, there is more wasteful living. 'There will be four brothers—two make money, and two spend it. They go to the Shah Nurpur fair (near Rawalpindi), and see what happens there! They garland the dancing girls with notes, a hundred-rupee note in the centre and the others all ten-rupee notes. They light the girls' cigarettes with ten-rupee notes; one person even used a thousand-rupee note.' 'That fair is in the Punjab,' said the landlord patriotically; 'it is not our business.'

When I asked in what other ways people spent their money—in this rich sugar-cane tract they get much more of it than they did—the Tehsildar said, upon marriages. The father of a Mohmand bride now expects from two to three thousand rupees as bride-price as against 500 to 1,000 before the war. The price is high as Mohmand women are scarce; other tribesmen take only two to six hundred. The money is spent either upon clothes and jewellery for the bride or just pocketed, or in both ways. Not very

<sup>1</sup> Columella, *De Re Rustica*, i, 15. Tr. H. B. Ash.

different from the conditions described in the *Odyssey*, and before the last war still common in Russia.<sup>1</sup> The excuse given is that a bride would not be valued unless she were well paid for: about as convincing as the excuse sometimes given for wife-beating—how would she know she was loved if not occasionally beaten? There too there is change: there is much less of it than twenty or thirty years ago. Polygamy still survives, as one can well understand in a tract where might is still right and where the more sons a man has, the greater his power within and without the gate.

Our host, who owns about 500 acres, not only lives on his land but takes a keen interest in it as shown by his orchard and the high standard of cultivation all round. He settles his forty tenants' disputes and rarely turns them out. Some have been there since the days of his grandfather, and none less than four years. 'We do not think ourselves landlord and tenant: we are working co-operatively.' Very different, said the Tehsildar, from the two or three hundred other khans' in the tehsil: 'Few, perhaps ten or twelve, know their real duties: their interest is in pleasures and luxuries.' The older generation, he added, took an interest in their tenants, though not in the land, and forgathered with them. Now they may be more businesslike and keep accounts and even open shops, but there is less sympathy with their tenants, and very few live on their land. Fifty per cent, however, still settle their tenants' disputes and this saves them going to court.

It was the Tehsildar's first ride for seven or eight months, and by the time we got to Dargai he had had enough for one day and left me to continue my way alone along what every horseman must detest—a metalled road; and it was the hottest time of day, between one and two. But there came a moment when all traffic ceased and I had road and world to myself and complete silence except for the pud-pud of my horse's hoofs and 'the babbling gossip of the air'. Heat and fatigue were forgotten, and to be on a horse seemed the only way to travel. But it was not for long.

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, *Russia in Flux* p. 43. 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Pathan landlords.

As we approached Mardan, traffic reappeared and every hundred yards filled my suspicious South African with some new fear. And he had reason. A sudden clatter, and there, dashing towards us, was a runaway buffalo with a handcart attached. I had never seen a buffalo travel so fast. I turned the South African's head the other way and tried to get him down the grassy bank on the edge of the road, but, hearing the clatter and the shouts of the pursuers, he was seized with panic and backed on to the road. Buffalo and cart just missed us, but after that it was the devil's own business to get him past anything resembling either.

*November 27—Mardan to Shewa—23 miles*

A drop of rain in the night had cleared the horizon, and all the way we had brown hills near us to the left and blue hills far away to the right. It was a perfect day—cool, sunny and clear, which was lucky as I was out for eight hours. My companion was a Muslim kanungo<sup>1</sup> with a curious history. He came from Swat, the country behind the brown hills and beyond our writ, but was brought up in Calcutta. His father killed an enemy and, obeying tribal custom, fled the country to avoid starting a feud. He never returned, but his son did at the age of 17, for with his father's death bygones were bygones. Much as he liked Calcutta, he is sensible enough to prefer Swat—more economical, he said, and healthier, and the food is not adulterated. Comparing Bengali and Pathan, he said the Bengali tells fewer lies, but he is more cunning. He lives less well than the people of Swat, eating rice twice a day as against once a day in Swat *plus* bread made of maize. When he was in Calcutta there were four or five hundred Pathan money-lenders there, over a hundred of them from Swat. The foreign money-lender nearly always preys upon his clients, and the Pathan abroad is the worst of his kind.<sup>2</sup> As the kanungo pointed out, for a Muslim to lend money at all is a sin. 'Which is the Pathan's best quality?'

<sup>1</sup> A revenue official, the link between Tehsildar and patwari (see p. 20 (n)).

<sup>2</sup> cf. p. 136.

I asked. 'Hospitality. He also fights well, but he doesn't tell the truth.'

'And what is the Englishman's best quality?'

'His care for the people.'

'And now, Khan Sahib, tell me the truth. What do you think is his worst quality?'

'He came from abroad to get dominion.'

We were now riding cross-country and I heard a sound I had not heard for years—the moanings and groanings of the Persian wheel. It transported me back to the days over forty years ago when I first came to India and its long-drawn lament reminded me night and day that I was 6,000 miles away from everything familiar. Today it came charged with nostalgia for the intervening years, chanting, too, a threnody for an age in which the hard unyielding iron takes the place of the melodious creaking wood, and the oil-engine fills the air with hiccups.

What surprised me on the road, after all I had heard of the new spirit abroad, was the number of people who salaamed one who was a total stranger, with no badge of authority about him, accompanied too only by a humble but most agreeable kanungo on a little white pony. What did not surprise me was to see hardly one woman's face. The few we met concealed their charms—or lack of them—in voluminous flowery shawls or in the all-enveloping purdah shroud. All but the poorest Pathans keep their womenfolk in 'four-walled' purdah, and the general feeling of insecurity does not encourage change. My companion said there was more security in Swat than around Mardan—a sad reflexion upon our rule. 'That's because your system of justice allows so many of the guilty to escape punishment. In Swat too there is greater severity of punishment.' It's significant that the village houses have no windows facing outwards, and that there are a number of little watch-towers about. The rest-houses, too, tell the same tale in a different way.

With a Congress Ministry governing the province, there has been a great change in the administration. 'Do the people mind it?' I asked. 'Whose the stick', he quoted, 'his the buffalo'—the rustic version of 'might is right';



and people, he added, don't expect anything else. At the moment Congress hold the stick, and they naturally use it as suits them best. Party men, it is said, are being put into key posts and others turned out on one pretext or another to make room for them. Everyone praises the Chief Minister as a man, and that I can well understand after meeting him, but no one seems to have a good word for his party's administration. How has Congress won so much influence in so Muslim a province, is a question I have asked of many. All agree that it began with the Red Shirt movement in the late twenties, when to challenge the established order was automatically to be pro-Congress, Congress being then the only nationalist organization of any importance. In Abdul Ghafar Khan, too, the movement had a born leader, who succeeded in rallying round him the poorer and more discontented elements in the province. After the fashion of those days he gave them red shirts to wear and a semi-military organization. This, of course, led to violence, and the organization was drastically dealt with. A legacy of bitterness is the result.

We were approaching a large village when we met a number of khans in a tonga on their way to attend a Muslim League meeting in a neighbouring village. They knew my companion and got out of their tonga to greet him. Introductions followed and they insisted on taking me back to their village. There, seated in the courtyard of one of their houses and regaled with tea and fruit, we had some very frank talk. This frankness of speech is one of the Pathan's most attractive qualities, but one must be prepared for home truths. One of the khans began inveighing against the Deputy Commissioner and his failure to use his powers. 'But he has no powers now,' I said, remembering what I had heard from one person after another since I came to the Frontier. This idea he ridiculed. 'He has so much power that, if he liked, he could raze this village to the ground. And what right has he not to use his power when he gets 2,200 rupees a month? I shall write to the Governor: he was here as Assistant Commissioner; he knows me well; he will interfere.' On this point he was completely out of date, but nothing would persuade him

of the change. 'After all,' he said, 'if the Governor wishes, he can use Section 93.'

How great was the change I only realized when a Deputy Commissioner told me that no one came to see him because they knew he could do nothing for them. Congress has got such a hold over these parts that all with an axe to grind turn to the Ministers where in the old days they would have gone to the Deputy Commissioner and, if necessary, waited hours to see him. This was all the more surprising in the case of this particular Deputy Commissioner, for he is, by common consent, a popular officer and fond of the people. Not long ago, after a long friendly talk at a village gathering, he asked those present whether he could do anything for them. He was thanked in the politest manner but told that it would be troubling him unnecessarily to approach him, as everyone knew he no longer had any power. That this was true was shown by my companion who, of his own accord, said the same thing. What makes the change serious—and in great degree it is an all-India change—is that power is gone but responsibility remains, the latter only too clearly in the eyes of the khans I was talking to.

My host's son was now produced, and his father complained bitterly that, after spending two thousand rupees on his education and training for a modest post in Government service, he had been told there was no job for him, 'simply because', said the father, 'I belong to the League'. Strong feeling was also shown over the advent of electric light to the village—the first Indian village I have seen to enjoy this priceless boon. When the electricians came to wire the houses—I repeat what I was told—it was found that their orders were to wire only the shops and houses in the bazaar, a predominantly Hindu area. But they admitted that protest secured the wiring of their houses as well. That was not the end of their complaints—and in these days there is no end to a Leaguer's complaints against Congress. They were loud in their denunciation of the way rationed articles are distributed: it is the followers of

<sup>1</sup> Under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, if the constitutional machinery fails to work, the Governor can take over the government of the province.

Congress who get the wheat and the sugar, the paraffin and the matches. 'Look at this,' and one of the khans drew a box of matches out of the folds of a garment; 'yesterday I had to pay four annas for this, and the controlled price is two pice.' When we set off again, my Muslim companion said it was the League when in office which started this bad practice.

Riding on, we came to a broad ditch full of muddy-looking water. As there was some sort of track down to it and up the other side, I went straight ahead without a thought, only to feel the South African I was riding rapidly sinking beneath me into the mud. I flung myself off to lighten his back and, after a great effort, being a sturdy little beast, he managed to get out. With the mud well over my knees, I took a little longer. Fortunately I was wearing puttees instead of my usual top boots, and with the help of the farther bank, which I was just able to touch, I did the trick. My next concern was to catch my mount. I think he must have wanted sympathy, for he was thick in mud up to the saddle flaps, and he allowed himself to be caught at once and responded most engagingly to my caresses. We have christened him David and his giant stablemate Goliath. Unlike their prototypes, they are the best of friends and neither can bear being separated from the other.

*November 28—Shewa to Gohatti—12 miles the way we rode*

The high light today was a visit to Shewa, a large Congress village of 6,000 inhabitants and a Red Shirt stronghold. I wanted to see a Red Shirt village, and word had been sent to say I was coming. I got a polite but formal welcome at one of the village guest-houses and was given a charpoy to myself, while the few present sprinkled themselves a little frigidly over the six or seven charpoys arranged round the courtyard. So we began, but when we ended nearly two hours later, the courtyard was packed and most of those present had to stand. Halfway through, tea and hard-boiled eggs were served—the final mark that my visit was accepted in the spirit which had prompted it. Home

<sup>1</sup> A halfpenny; four pice make one anna.

truths about the British and their highly suspect policies were on everybody's lips, yet there was perfect good temper with occasional ripples of laughter, and the hubble-bubbles from a hookah going the round of the charpoys added a mellowing touch. One of the first to appear was a small peasant proprietor, the owner of a dozen acres, who was introduced as 'the Congress General'. A more striking figure was an aged red-bearded khan, 70 to 75 years old, a typical Pathan—tall, thin, and with a prominent aquiline nose.

The proceedings began, very naturally, with questions about myself—Why had I come? What was I about? It was not a moment for modesty, so I declared myself an author and a student of village life who had come out entirely on his own to see how the villager was faring after the war. I took notes the whole time, and no one objected. My ignorance of Pushtu was a handicap, but I had a good interpreter at my side. The discussion, or rather the speeches, began with a long oration by a khan in answer to the question, What did they want most? 'We are slaves,' he said, 'and now we look towards freedom. Under the English we have been walking in the dark, but Gandhi, Nehru, Maulana Azad, Abdul Ghafar Khan and Dr Khan Sahib have showed us the way and we have come to the door of freedom.'

'Surely the Pathan has always been free. In what way are you not free?'

'Before this there was no education and great harshness. In England there are factories and men make what they please. Here there are none. We cannot make pistols, guns, aeroplanes, motors or clothes: there is no permission, and this will be so until the English go. It is the same for both Hindu and Muslim. We are still slaves; we have only got to freedom's door.'

'But now you have your own Government.'

'Yes, but it's only temporary rule. You will not let power go. You stirred up the trouble in Bihar,<sup>1</sup> and you support the League in their doings.'

'But the beating of Muslim and Hindu is being done by Hindu and Muslim on each other.'

<sup>1</sup> Early in November several thousand Muslims were massacred in Bihar by Hindus, see p. 63.

‘It is done on the order of the English. Look at Nehru. He came here and was beaten up on the Malakand. Why was that? Because the Political Agent stirred the people up.’ When the English came here, they made people into Khan Sahibs and Khan Bahadurs, who oppressed us. Now we support Congress.’

‘However that may be, we have now decided to hand over India, and, having just come from England, I can assure you that almost everyone there wants to give India full freedom.’

‘You promise us freedom but don’t give it. Have you not been here 120 years and still you do not give it?’

‘The government of forty crores<sup>2</sup> of people can’t be handed over in a moment. And until Hindus and Muslims join hands, it is difficult to know to whom to hand over. The English are a law-abiding people and don’t like the thought of leaving India to big troubles.’

‘Leave the country,’ said a voice to my left; ‘we will put up with what happens.’ Here the red-bearded elder joined in. ‘You have been here 120 years, yet there is no peace. In Swat there is peace, because there they have the rule of the Koran.’

Remembering what my companion from Swat told me yesterday, I thought it prudent at this point to turn from the past to the future. ‘What’, I asked, ‘will you do with freedom when you get it?’ The reaction to this simple question was surprising. These were keen-witted politicians, who were so indignant about the past that surely, I thought, they must have some plan for the future. But the only answer I got, and that after a pause, was: ‘Our leaders, Nehru and Abdul Ghafar, will tell us.’

‘But don’t you want things for your village—a hospital, or better roads?’

‘We will do according to the state of the country,’ was the evasive reply. Yet there was a spark of good sense amongst them, for when, after much thought, someone said, ‘We shall reduce the land revenue and the taxes,’ a wiser

<sup>1</sup> The Political Agent was suspended but subsequently exonerated on the finding of a Judge of the Madras High Court deputed to inquire into his conduct.

<sup>2</sup> 400 millions.

mind observed, 'You can't have democracy without taxes'. But, since everything had to be given an anti-British turn, he added: 'In the old days we paid Government 10 per cent of our produce and a *zakat*<sup>1</sup> of 2½ per cent of our income. The English reduced the taxes, but when we have our own way we shall increase them.'

At this point a boy of ten or twelve with a sickly face and dressed in rags was produced. 'Have you anything like that in England?' I was asked. Remembering a heart-breaking book about a London slum which came out during the war, I said—'Yes, but not so many as you have.' Whereat, again to my surprise, someone turning to his fellows, said: 'How can you not be poor when you have so many children?' The most pertinent question of the morning, and it provoked a babel of voices. At last we were off politics into economics, and I seized the opportunity to ask them about the cultivation of tobacco, which is the great crop round here, and a very important one for the peasant proprietor, which most of these people were, for, with its help, three acres will support a family, or even two, if the land is good and well tilled. Another babel broke out when I asked its price—all directed against the heavy duty imposed during the war, and a sufficient answer to the charge that we had reduced taxation. There were a number of Hindu traders present, some of them money-lenders. They declared they charged only twelve per cent. But this was said in Urdu, for my ear alone; and afterwards I learnt that the lowest rate is still the traditional 18½ per cent and often twice this amount.

A question about the number of soldiers in the village—'There are 15 to 17'—brought us back to politics. One of them, a sepoy who had fought in both North Africa and Italy, broke into a long anti-British harangue in Urdu. 'Indians', he said, 'gave you help and great kindness, but you put them in front and the English stayed in the rear. We bore with this that we might be free. Hitler was your enemy, not ours. We suffered in the war, but you didn't.'

<sup>1</sup> The orthodox Muslim considers himself obliged to give away 2½ per cent of his net income every year in charity.

‘Did we not! Bombs came down upon us again and again from the sky. My own house was so badly damaged that I could not live in it for months.’ Undeterred the sepoy went on—‘Our pay was only eighteen rupees a month’—a gross understatement—‘but a Major got nine hundred’, and so forth. Winding up the proceedings, which had been entirely courteous, I thanked them for answering my questions so frankly and said that, though I agreed with them on some points, I had my own views on others.

Approaching the next village, we found a League meeting going on in the dry bed of the shallow little river below it. There was an array of loud-speakers and, as we rode past, we caught echoes of abuse of H.M.G. for favouring the Congress! The Naib-Tehsildar with me remarked with a laugh: ‘At Shewa the English were abused for helping the League, and here is the League abusing them for helping Congress.’ It’s the same at this evil moment throughout the country, and it all derives from Delhi. The ‘Leaders’ have only to say a thing today for all their supporters to say the same thing tomorrow. Years ago I was told by Indian colleagues that *bhedchal*—the way of sheep—was the way of the peasant, and here it is with a vengeance, and not confined to the peasant. Yet some few still have views of their own, and we came across one of them when we entered a Subedar’s guest-house in the village. ‘There is trouble without limit,’ said the old veteran, whose service began in 1897. ‘There was once justice and freedom, with no controls. You should not give the reins to others. The English understand government: surrender it and there will be disturbance. Already there is no justice and much faction. It is the duty of the King to look at all alike; this Government looks only to its supporters. We don’t want either League or Congress. What we want is tranquillity, so there must be division’—in other words, Pakistan.

Politics in this province are having a demoralizing influence. Nehru’s recent visit, to which the people of Shewa referred, has had a disturbing effect on both sides of the border. The sight of a Hindu addressing them as the

spokesman of the Government of India made the tribesmen realize, as nothing before, the reality of the impending change and convinced them that it meant Hindu Raj. They expressed their feelings at one tribal gathering attended by Nehru by walking out after five minutes, and at another his suggestion that they were not free under the present dispensation did not incline them to linger much longer. The League is making all the capital it can out of the visit, and also out of the Hindu atrocities in Bihar—the Muslim atrocities in Eastern Bengal are not mentioned ! The distressing result is acute tension between Hindus and Leaguers. Over 200 Hindus are said to have left Swat, and some of those who live in League villages round Mardan are sending their families and account books to Mardan for safety.

All day the sky had been heavily overcast, and it now began to rain. It was my first ride on Corydon, our third horse, and we plodded along slowly together, slowly because he might well have been named Rozinante, so little is he but skin and bones, and, worst of all, he forges. Why on earth did we buy him ? was the inevitable question as again and again one hoof struck another. The answer was simple, but at the moment unconvincing. Till we got to Delhi, P. had never been on a horse and Corydon had one great asset—in his present condition he could not have thrown a babe. Skin and bones, too, told a tale of neglect which might be rectified ; had he not once been a polo pony of quality ? Yet there rang in one's ears the words of a friend at Peshawar—' You'll be lucky if he does a hundred miles '. I rode him today because I wanted to give David and Goliath a rest after the 66 miles of the first three days—rather too much for horses that are not yet quite in their stride. So off they went in charge of a syce to do the nine straight miles along a canal to Gohatti. What was my concern, on getting here at three, to learn that they had not yet arrived ! Thanks to an unexpected telephone, we tracked them down to Hamzakot eighteen miles away. On reaching the canal bank, a stone's throw from the rest-house, the syce had turned north instead of south. This meant eighteen unnecessary miles. So much



for their half-holiday ! We ordered them back to Shewa for the night—if it was too late for them to get here—and sent back our truck with their forage and gear.

And the truck had a narrow escape. The canal bank was slippery with the rain, and a bad skid almost put it into the canal.

*November 29—Gohatti to Topi via Swabi—16 miles*

Nothing in the Indian cold weather is more depressing than rain, and nothing lovelier than the sunshine that follows it. Today the country was worthy of the change—hills widely spaced, one even touched with snow ; the willows a glistening harmony of yellow and green ; the young wheat quickening with new life and spreading its emerald carpet across the plain.

I walked the five miles to Swabi, as my guide, an intelligent Pathan kanungo (until recently a patwari<sup>1</sup>) had only a bicycle. We talked the whole way—endless things to talk about in India. He had led the recent strike of patwaris in his circle. What would the Revenue pundits of the past have said ! But can one blame humble officials whose pay, already too low, is almost annihilated by the three to four hundred per cent rise in prices ? Government gives them an extra twenty or thirty per cent and is surprised that they still can't live on their pay. Almost every official I meet makes the same complaint. One on Rs. 150 a month is given an extra 17½ per cent, and as he has children and relatives to support, he has had to draw on his inheritance for Rs. 3,000. Another, one of my former stenographers, tells me that he has spent all his savings and has had to borrow a thousand rupees from a brother. Thanks to their 43-day strike, the patwaris can now look forward to a living wage—fifty to ninety rupees a month (according to length of service) instead of the present twenty-two to twenty-eight. But a wiser Government would have anticipated so just a demand and avoided what may well start an epidemic. In return for the concession, said my guide, the patwaris promised to give up all 'taking and giving' and to charge only the right fees for their

<sup>1</sup> The village accountant, whose chief duty is to keep the land records up to date

various services. 'The people are ignorant: we charge them eight annas or a rupee when only four annas are due.' How long, I wonder, will they keep to their side of the bargain?

Our talk as we walked was mostly about the Pathans, who are an individual race and very different from the Punjabis. Once more I asked, What is their best quality?, and as before the answer was, Hospitality; but a further quality was added: they will give their lives to protect a guest, and also 'one who lives in the same shade', for instance their servant or shopkeeper. And their worst quality? 'It is their quarrelsomeness, which sets father against son, brother against brother. Once there was good feeling, but now often there is hatred. No one respects anyone else. There is also much extravagance.' My guide's talk suggested the Pathan was going to the dogs, and when I asked him what changes he had seen for the better in his 25 years of adult life, like many others I have asked in different parts of India this year and last, he could think of nothing offhand. But some good points emerged from our talk: far less beating of wives; dancing girls much less in vogue at weddings, and the Pathan now more of a man and less of an animal, and 'awaking out of his sleep'. But when I suggested putting the spread of education on the credit side of the account, he would have none of it. 'There is no advantage from that: it is good for service only; it would be different if everyone had education as in your country.'

He had much to put on the debit side. Women now go on the stage—that was 'very bad'—and litigation had increased to such an extent that an ordinary village spent as much upon it in a year as they paid in land revenue. 'Look at the number of officers in this tehsil compared with 25 years ago'—and he gave me figures. Then, too, there was no religious education. Yet he admitted that 80 per cent still said their prayers five times a day—the men in the mosque, or wherever they were; the women in their houses—and all fasted throughout Ramzan. A patwari who joined us claimed to be able to read the Koran, but

<sup>1</sup> He meant officers for trying cases.

only in Arabic, which he did not understand. The kanungo had read it in Pushtu and was surprised and pleased to hear that I had read most of it in English.

To one who travels, the most serious item to be entered in the balance sheet is the insecurity of the public highway after dark. Everyone agreed that it is unwise to be out then, and later in the day another kanungo urged me to bring a village meeting to a close, alleging that the road was bad and we had far to go. He confessed afterwards, when I found a very good road, that what he feared was being overtaken by night near hills full of outlaws. He, too, came from Swat and confirmed that one can go about there night and day without fear. 'There justice is swift. A man commits a murder and in twelve hours he will be arrested, tried and shot. Here it may take a year or two, and as likely as not, when tried, he will get off, and then a blood feud starts. That is what is wrong—the law. What is wanted is the *Shariat*<sup>1</sup>—the Law of God. Muslims should be compelled to live according to this law.' As we were talking, a tonga passed. 'Look,' said the kanungo, 'it has a dead man behind.' And sure enough there was a lifeless figure stretched on the floor at the back of the tonga with a bit of sacking to hide it. 'He has been murdered, and they are taking him for the post-mortem.'

Under the *Shariat* daughters are entitled to a share in ancestral land, but under tribal custom only to maintenance. When I pointed out that this must make for ever smaller holdings in a country where holdings are already too small, the kanungo looked at me gravely and said: 'Do you suppose that God did not think of this when He ordained the *Shariat*?' There was no answer to this, and we passed on to the more ascertainable relationship between husband and wife. He defended the 'four-walled' purdah system as one enjoined by the Koran and said that women were so well considered under Islamic law that, whereas twelve duties were prescribed for the husband, only nine were for the wife. Unfortunately, he did not know what they were. Kanungo and patwari, both Pathans, disagreed on whether the Pathan still took a price for his daughters, no

<sup>1</sup> The Muslim canon law.

doubt because custom differs from tribe to tribe. One habit seems common to all—tea-drinking. Before the Great War only men of means drank it, but with the return of the soldier who had been abroad it spread, and now almost everyone drinks it twice a day—early in the morning and between four and five in the afternoon, with gur now instead of sugar, which is rationed : not a good change, it was said—it makes men ill. Sheep's milk, on the other hand, goes well with it. But how, I asked, did the Pathan entertain his guest before the days of tea ? ' He gave him 1½ lb. of ghi<sup>1</sup> and 6 oz. of gur.' Rich fare, indeed.

A sign of the prosperity brought by the war was the swarm of tongas waiting for hire in Swabi. During the first war, when the kanungo was a clerk there, there were only fifty in the whole tehsil : now there are 400.

There was little sign of prosperity in the village (Bajah) where we stopped later on. It was the abode of small peasant proprietors, most of whom owned only two or three acres. Many had had to seek their fortune abroad. Two hundred had gone into the army, and some of them were present at our meeting. ' How are you faring ? ' I asked. They replied a little wryly that they were farming, but it was a difficult business as land was short and bullocks and implements were dear. ' But haven't you brought back money with you ? ' One said he had saved Rs. 2,500 but had used it to redeem his land ; another that Rs. 800 were due to him and had not been paid in spite of repeated requests, and a third said much the same. ' Why don't you ask the Soldiers' Board to help you ? ' ' We have been there more than once, but we have to pay two rupees eight annas to have our petition written ; then the clerks want money. The Lieutenant in charge (an Indian) says he will inquire, but we hear nothing.' Not an uncommon complaint in these parts.

It was not long before we got on to politics, led by the village representative of Congress. Congress aim at having a cell in every village. He was well up in their propaganda and knew of course all about ' British Imperialism ', and he had as much earnestness as racial prejudice, but he laughed

<sup>1</sup> Clarified butter.

readily when any little point was made against him. He repeated what others have said about the Deputy Commissioner—‘In his hand there is nothing’. Of Abdul Ghafar Khan, the Red Shirt leader, he said that he found them animals and made them human, ‘but’, he added in the endearing manner of the Indian peasant, ‘we are only fifteen annas human.’<sup>1</sup>

Opinions about Abdul Ghafar differ, and the difference is not just a matter of party affiliation. Some accuse him of stopping at nothing to serve his purposes, others accord him the rare virtue of disinterestedness. On one point all agree—his fanatical dislike of British rule, and it is significant that his followers always call him Badshah Khan or King.

Turning to the present situation, the Congress spokesman said: ‘We have become partners in Hindustan. When the British remove their feet, Hindu and Muslim will succeed in being back to back. Now all the controls are in your hands.’ The local head of the League was also present but too shy to reply at any length when I gave him the chance. He did little more than stress the difficulty of getting a fair share of the controlled commodities, especially matches. Matches have, indeed, become almost a battlecry between the two parties.

Aprpos of the Deputy Commissioner’s new position, lesser officials are naturally in the same case. The other day an Indian revenue officer said to me—‘I have six times less authority than I had before. Whatever I do, someone complains to the Minister.’ ‘How do you manage then?’ I asked. ‘We must dodge them,’ was the canny reply. When I mentioned the ‘six times less’ to a Tehsildar, he exclaimed—‘Not six times but eight times less: ten years ago I was more powerful as Naib-Tehsildar than I am now as Tehsildar. All that remains to us is our criminal powers.’

I saw my first horseman this afternoon, if a middle-aged man in spectacles jogging quietly along on a grey pony and escorted by a number of men on foot can be called a horseman. We were now approaching the valley of the Indus. Far away to the south, the hills which cradle it at Attock glowed in the sunset. On our left, the camel-brown hills

<sup>1</sup> That is, one anna short of the full sixteen in the rupee.

along which we have been marching since Mardan were closing in upon us, and straight ahead, beyond the still unseen river, rose the hills of Hazara. It was dusk when we reached Topi, and very glad my companion was to get there before dark. To him the hills spoke only of highway robbery and death.

## II—ACROSS THE INDUS

*November 30—Topi to Tarbela—13 miles*

Many great days have I had upon rivers, but none greater than upon the Indus, and if I were a worshipper of streams, it would be of 'Abba Sind'—the Father of Rivers—as the Pathans call it. Today we crossed it, and never have I seen it look more beautiful.

The day began with curds for breakfast, such as my soul loveth when mixed with grape nuts, raisins, milk and cream, and dashed with sugar to counter the sourness of the curd. All due to an old soldier with whom A. fell in yesterday on the road. He became so friendly that he wanted to entertain us at Swabi. Impossible, she said, as we were not stopping there. Then he must give us butter, and he was so insistent that A. told him of my love of curds. Off he went to his village, and when A. got to Swabi, there he was waiting for her with two neat little earthenware pots full of it. He had had five children, and when the fifth had followed the other four to his grave, his wife begged him to take another wife. 'No,' he said; 'before God have I married you and you are my wife.' His fidelity was rewarded. She bore him five more children and all have survived.

It was a day of sweet sounds. The first was the sound of water flowing over stones. A mere echo at first, but as we climbed a hill to see the view, swelling to a crescendo of harmony. Standing on the hill-top, we had the mile-wide river valley at our feet, its many waters spreading southwards from the distant snows in streams of jade and turquoise. The next sound was whirring millstones. Six of Sisyphean size were revolving in the half-light of a grass-thatched shed

on the edge of one of the valley's many streams, and as they revolved, light, darkness and sound mingled in rhythmic spell. Before each stone crouched the peasant whose maize was being ground, and at the far end of the shed others deftly turned the flour into enormous girdle-cakes over a red-hot fire. A scene for Rembrandt's brush, and outside the sunlight turned the thatch to gold. Next came the splashing of our horses through the shallow stream; and then, on the bank of the Indus itself, the bubbling of camels protesting against their loading after being ferried across; and finally, the sound of their bells as they swung away in a long string across the white sand.

At the ferry, camels, donkeys and ponies were being embarked or disembarked. Disembarkation was easy enough with *terra firma* to jump on to, but no four-footed beast could get over the gunwales without a jump and a plunge, and many said quite definitely, 'We won't'. The donkeys who said this were picked up by their hind legs and just flung aboard; but you can't treat a camel like a donkey, and those who were obstinate had to be lifted into the boat leg by leg, neck and throat bubbling and gurgling in indignant protest. The drama continued all day, and each boatload presented some new comedy. We were less inclined to laugh when the time came to put our own three horses across. Would they consent to go on board, and would they do so without damaging their knees? For a time it was touch and go, but, with carrot and gur as magnet and some timely taps of my crop, they all got on unhurt. These boats should, of course, have a collapsible end or side. The four-legged could then get on and off without what Arthur Young calls 'the abominable operation', common in the England of his day (but not in France) 'of beating horses until they leap into them'.<sup>1</sup>

We were now in Hazara, still amongst Pathans, but Pathans who no longer spoke Pushtu, and almost everyone salaamed—a sign that Red Shirts were no longer predominant. We rode the ten miles up stream to Tarbela mostly at a walk, since it was P.'s first venture into the open on a horse. The country, too, was made for leisurely

<sup>1</sup> *Travels in France*, 10 June 1787.

progress with hills on either side, brown and bare no doubt, but with the Indus flowing between them bluer than the gentian and with the lustre of a Persian tile. The sun had almost set as we approached Tarbela and peasants were releasing their bullocks from yoke and plough, with a moment's caress before starting them homewards. It had long been dark when distant headlights at last announced the coming of the truck. To get across the Indus it had had to do a detour of over a hundred miles.

So much for the road. Now for some of those we talked to on our way. There was the soldier who, speaking of kingship, said it had to deal with 'such very little things and such very big ones'. And another who, when asked which he liked best—soldiering or farming—said: 'Soldiering—that is dry work, but farming is earthy work.' He showed us his wounds, gained in Italy, and like others I met yesterday, said the Army still owed him Rs. 800. P. sympathized, as he had had great difficulty in getting his bonus on being released from our Navy. As the hills to our left were in Swat, there was more talk about this seeming paradise. Not a single murder there this year, it was said—and in the Swabi tehsil, as many in two months as in the whole of the year before. But in Swat, it is 'the rule of the stick'.

A small but interesting point. Alexander is still remembered as a great conqueror, but we could hear of no legends about him.

### *December 1—Sunday*

Our first halt, and much needed by our horses, two of whom have done 120 miles in six days.

A Seyed came to see me this morning to get me to recommend him for the modest but much prized honour of a chair in a District Durbar. That I had never seen him before was an irrelevant detail. His grandfather six generations back—he mentioned their names in turn—was a Pir,<sup>1</sup> and had founded the adjacent village. His descendant still has fifty to sixty followers in the village, who come to him for spells, which they hang round head, neck

<sup>1</sup> A Muslim religious leader.



or arm. But they do this much less than before, and all along my route people agree that the influence of the Pir is nothing like what it was twenty years ago.

In the afternoon I met members of the local village bank, founded eighteen years ago when I was Registrar of Co-operative Societies. After talk about the bank's affairs, we got on to politics and someone said: 'We were displeased when we heard of the difference between Jinnah and Nehru. If there is no agreement, there can be no *azadi*—no freedom. People ask, why is there no agreement?' The Cabinet Mission's promise to bypass either side which refused to co-operate was then mentioned.<sup>1</sup> 'Jinnah Sahib accepted the offer. Why then was he not asked to form a Government? Instead, Nehru was asked. What we want is Pakistan—to be free of the Hindus, because of their greater numbers. Here we are cent per cent for the League.'

'But why do you want this thing you call *azadi* when you are so free already?' I asked, wishing to probe them.

'When we fought in France against Germany, we had great sorrow because we were not free like the French and the Germans. But we do not want to hold on to the hands of the Hindus. Muslims are straightforward, Hindus are underhand. I was once a Red Shirt. That was because in those days the Frontier had no Reforms<sup>2</sup> and the Frontier Crimes Act was the law. Our relations across the Indus were looted, and there was oppression, and the *Shariat* was not in force.'

Others spoke and one, with more wisdom than most, said: 'Freedom is a great thing: we don't reach to that.'

### *December 2—Tarbela to Haripur—13 miles*

It is 7.30 and the sun is not yet over the hills, but across the river they are red with its light, and the more distant hills of Amb are amethyst and purple. 'And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord' said Moses to the Israelites. Did he perhaps feel the beauty of dawn

<sup>1</sup> See paragraph 8 of the Mission's Statement dated 16 June 1946.

<sup>2</sup> The Montagu-Chelmsford Reform scheme embodied in the Act of 1919, and commonly known as diarchy, was not applied to the N.W. Frontier Province.

and sunrise in the hills ? And who could not feel it when the hills are bare and respond to the subtlest gradations of light ?

So much I wrote while waiting for breakfast. This was hardly finished when the leading landowner in the tract came to see me in order to continue yesterday's talk, in which he had taken part. This he did non-stop for over half an hour. He began by saying that Tashkent was only an hour away by air, and that even by road the Oxus, with Russia looking across it, was not so very far away. 'If a fight comes, the people must feel the fight is theirs. Then they will fight as the Germans did in East Prussia—with heart and life. They do not feel that now, and would be helpless against Russia. The British must therefore remain. As long as they are at the centre, Government will be strong. With Congress there it will not be strong. If it is, then we must have Pakistan ; otherwise the Hindus will dominate us. If Congress gets power, we shall have to fight it : it is the same as the Hindu Mahasabha.<sup>1</sup> If we are not ready, we shall become the slaves of the Hindus, and our existence will be finished. The Red Shirts want the Hindus and Russia to join hands. The League wants the British to help the Muslims in developing Pakistan.'

'Khan Sahib, there is much mention of Russia here. Do the common folk talk of her ?'

'Not those who can't read, but those who read the newspapers think we should develop India like Russia.'

'How many get papers here every day ?'

'In these four villages, ten ; others can't read. We are ready to fight the Hindus, but we don't want to disobey Government. We have been loyal subjects of the British Government and we want to be faithful to it, but we don't want Muslims to be killed. Many Pathans were killed in Bombay'—and many more in Bihar, he might have added.

'I have heard it said that discharged soldiers are bringing back revolvers. Is that the case here ?' (This is an important recruiting area.)

'To some extent yes, but not more than 5 per cent,

<sup>1</sup> A Hindu organization for the furtherance of Hindu interests.

chiefly from the Burma front. But people are buying rifles—all they can—from the factories at Kohat and elsewhere. Hawkers from the Tribes sell to them. Sikhs are getting them from Patiala, Faridkot,<sup>1</sup> and Amritsar.'

'When you get freedom, what will you do with it?'

'The consolidation of holdings is necessary and must be made compulsory. Some fields are so small that they cannot be shown on the village map. We must also have panchayats with powers to run hospitals and schools.'

'You realize that will mean bigger taxes?'

'Yes, I do, but we are prepared to give more; only it must be used well. We can get electric power from the Brandu (a tributary of the Indus); then we can have textile mills and a small-arms factory.'

Finally, returning to his original theme, the Khan Sahib said: 'Russia is the other side of Amb.'<sup>2</sup> How can we protect ourselves? If we couldn't do this against the Sikhs, who were few, how can we do it against the Hindus who are many? They have both money and arms. The British *must* stay.'

The Khan Sahib had not the gift of logical expression, but he expressed clearly enough his fear of Russia and of Hindu domination. The latter was already an obsession with most Muslims when I visited the Punjab in the spring, and is certainly no weaker today.

It was now more than time to start, but we had not got very far before I found myself pressed by the headmaster to visit the local school, which we were passing. The forty or fifty boys—no girls amongst them—were drawn up in a wide semicircle to greet me, and some of them looked so sickly that I inquired about them and three boys complained of fever. Many of the boys come three miles on foot every day, some even six, and they do it back again in the afternoon, with precious little to eat in between. My inquiries were cut short by a cry from outside that David was shying at a passing camel. He is as panicky at the sight of a camel as some women at the sight of a wasp, and on we had to go to quiet him. Our road took us up the valley

<sup>1</sup> Patiala and Faridkot are both States with Sikh rulers.

<sup>2</sup> A not very distant tribal State.

of the Siran, which was blue and sparkling under a cloudless sky. Last week's rain, which has set the young wheat astir with growth, has left behind it a radiant world.

Some miles on we stopped to see another village bank (Thapla). The village is typical of the tract : the holdings are so small—the largest a bare four acres—that farming is second to service in the army and elsewhere, and land is so valuable that it now sells at the rate of Rs. 8,000 (£600) an acre. The usual League views were expressed. ‘ Hindu and Muslim are two different nations : at the Id<sup>1</sup> Muslims have to slaughter cows, but the cow is the Hindu's *buzurg*<sup>2</sup>—his Great One. The English, on the other hand, do not differ in religion from the Muslims. Like the Hindus the Muslims want freedom, but the Hindus want the country to themselves. If the English leave, both Hindu and Muslim will die fighting each other. Hence our need for Pakistan.’ With the nearest school three miles away, the village is virtually dependent on the army for its education, and on one newspaper for its information. Medically they are a little better off than the people of Tarbela as they are a few miles nearer Haripur, which has the only hospital in the neighbourhood.

After we had been regaled in the hospitable Pathan way with tea, fruit and drop scones made of eggs, flour, gur and ghi, I rode on ahead leaving A. and P. to follow, in P.'s interest, at a beginner's pace. This maddened Goliath, on whom A. was riding, and twice he nearly put her over the cliff, backing and rearing in his exasperation at being left behind by his beloved David. Rather too many excitements for the first week.

Meanwhile I was passing a shrine, where there is a well, whose water is reputed a sovereign remedy for diseases of the eye. Many come to be healed—always on a Thursday—and, in exchange for five pice given to the waterman, get as much water as they need for their eyes, with excellent results, it is claimed, even in cases which have defeated the eye doctors of Rawalpindi ! Whether the latter would

<sup>1</sup> The Bakr-Id, one of the two greatest Muslim festivals commemorating the projected sacrifice of Isaac.

<sup>2</sup> *Buzurg* means literally great, and is commonly applied to the elders of a family

admit this I don't know, but more interesting to me at the moment than any miraculous water was the sight of two figures waving to me from a distance. The T.'s—friends of many years but hardly seen since '32—had ridden out to meet us, and after much talk bridging space and time, the five of us cavalcaded into Haripur.

*December 3—Haripur to Wab via Kot Najib Khan, Usman Khattar and Budho—24 miles*

The direct way would have been shorter, but that meant a metalled road, and to both horse and horseman that is anathema. As it was, I did not see a single lorry or car the whole way, and instead of hootings, rattlings and poundings, all I heard was the patter of donkeys' feet, the soft puds of the camel, the shufflings and shamblings of cattle, and the O-ee's of those who urged them on. I was alone, with nothing to distract me from the beauty of the scene. And what beauty!—the kind which, for a moment at least, makes the spirit forget the existence of the body and is a pledge that the body is not necessary for the existence of the spirit. The snows stretched almost unbroken from east to west, in all the loveliness of shadow and sunlight. The nearer hills were almost as lovely, folded in mist and steeped in star-sapphire blue. My road took me across a moorland country, bare and dry as a bone and broken by ravine after ravine, and when the sun rose high, the clothes that were at first like gossamer lay heavily upon me, and glad I was, after many miles, to come to the Harro and munch my sandwiches in the shade of a tree while David grazed.

I was not alone the whole way. The headmaster of a primary school overtook me on his bicycle and went along with me for a mile. Once more I heard the tale of a low-paid, official struggling with prices which mocked his 'dearness of living allowance'. That he was able to carry on was due to his owning five or six acres. A discharged soldier, with whom I also talked, and who had a wife and two children to support, was living on his war bonus of Rs. 1,000 and had only 200 left. 'We live, but it is a tight

fit,' he said. Not the least pleasant moment of the ride was when I came upon a signpost, one side pointing north and marked 'N.W.F.P.' and the other south and marked 'PUNJAB'. I have ridden many hundred miles up and down the Punjab, but never before have I entered it on a horse.

## Chapter II

### THE NORTHERN PUNJAB

#### I.—TOWARDS THE SALT RANGE

*December 4—Halt at Wab*

The climax of yesterday's ride was to enter this paradise of water, willow, orchard and hill, and to find, set in the midst of them, a rest-house built for Jehangir, who, beholding the beauty of the place, exclaimed in astonishment, 'Wah! Wah!' Is there anywhere else in the world water so clear, trout so fearless, and willows so caressing? The Grand Trunk Road from Peshawar to Bombay passes only half a mile away, yet the outer world is shut out completely by tree and hill. Even lovelier than the willows are the mulberry trees, in their autumn livery casting a golden spell upon the ever-flowing waters.

Our host, a cultivated Muslim, is in keeping with the spot. No one could be more solicitous for the comfort of his guests or more charming as a man. His elder brother, now alas no more, was the first Premier of the Punjab, and his father was with Nicholson in '57 when he fell mortally wounded in the storming of Delhi. Go back a generation and the tale is of a grandfather murdered one hot afternoon, like Hamlet's father, as he slept within his orchard up the hillside. The murderer was himself murdered by a neighbour, and, as on the Frontier, murder is still common in the district.

Much talk during our stay, so much that there has been no time to record it. The most interesting question we discussed was whether the British could be fairly charged with ruling India on the 'divide and rule' principle. Another Muslim present, an elder statesman of the Punjab, said he had never met any Englishman in favour of this, and he agreed that, however much communalism was the result of British policy—and what can one expect when hungry dogs are offered a bone?—it had never been part of the

PLATE I



Camels fording a side-stream of the Indus



Crossing the Indus : David going on board



PLATE II

Wayside inquiries



The truck



A. and P.

policy itself. Our host, on the other hand, hesitating a little in his courtesy, said that, though it had not been our deliberate policy, he thought a certain number of Englishmen were pleased at the result. Some few perhaps, but no one could be pleased who had to deal with communal disorder; it added enormously to work and anxiety, and there was always the fear that one might be hauled over the coals for firing too soon or too late, or not at all. As to the future, the elder of the two said that in his view India was not ripe for self-government. Other Muslims met on this tour have said much the same.

I sleep here in what is virtually part of the drawing-room, a vast domed room beautifully proportioned, and moulded in the Moghul style. But with a mattress—the first since leaving Peshawar—I would gladly sleep anywhere.

*December 5—Wah to Fatehjang—21 miles*

What delighted me today was once more to see horsemen. We had seven riding with us led by the zaildar,<sup>1</sup> a fine-looking man with a superb blue turban ending in a fountain of muslin gay as any helmet plume. I no longer felt an anachronism. Another sight recalling the past was the rows of peasants waiting patiently by the roadside at every village we passed. They, or their fathers, had been there when I last rode this way nearly eighteen years ago. The only noticeable change since then was the nature of the complaints. Today they were of the paltry allowance of sugar—only 6 oz. a head a month against 20 in the town, of the even more wretched allowance of cloth, a mere 3½ yards a quarter for people who require at least 20 for a single outfit,<sup>2</sup> and, as in the Frontier Province, of the high price of matches in ‘the black’, as it is called.

The village headmen riding with me were all supporters of the League. ‘What is its object?’ I asked them. ‘*Sanun kuchh patta nahin*—we have no idea,’ said one of them, and another added: ‘It is an affair of Muslims.’ A third was more explicit and said: ‘If there were no

<sup>1</sup> The headman of a group of villages.

<sup>2</sup> Shirt 3½ yards, shalwar trousers 4½, puggree 6 and chaddar (cotton plaid) 6 yards. Women require considerably more.

League, the Hindus would get the government and take away our land.' I tried another question: 'Who is the leader of the League?'

'Jinnah.'

'Where does he live?'

'In Lahore,' said one; but another muttered correctly: 'In Bombay.'

As to his colleagues, the only name suggested was Shaukat Hyat-Khan, a son of the late Premier. Mahatma Gandhi was quoted as the leader of the Hindus, but no other name was mentioned. Someone said apologetically: 'I am only a follower: whatever the League does is right.' The same mentality as at Shewa, and more suited to totalitarian than to democratic ways.

The zaildar could have answered all these questions, as he is a man of some education. He urged that the English should stay. 'Only from them can justice be had: others take bribes'—typical zaildar sentiments, but not altogether to be rejected on that account. He used a new and most expressive Anglo-Punjabi word, *gharbaration*, a highly charged form of *gharbar*—disturbance and confusion. That was easy to understand, but when the Co-operative Inspector with me said someone was '*tap par*', I was completely puzzled until I realized that '*tap*' was his way of saying '*top*'—on top, in fact.<sup>1</sup>

My companions were full of the bad state of the people owing to a poor monsoon. Sooner or later—the zaildar said next month, the Tehsildar here, not till March—most of the peasants in this area will have to buy grain to keep themselves alive. When the day comes, it will be a serious affair for the man with only one plough—the case with most of the cultivators in this landlord tract—as wheat is so dear. Even the controlled price—Rs. 10/1 a maund<sup>2</sup>—is four times what it was before the war, and 'in the black' it is Rs. 14 to 16.

A well-known broadcaster was once described in a leading newspaper as 'too passionate'. The same is the case with

<sup>1</sup> Compare Dandie Dinmont: 'Now, I say, the march rins on the tap o' the hill' (*Guy Mannering*, ch. 36).

<sup>2</sup> 82·28 lb.

Goliath. One example of excess in this direction I have already related. Today I had got off him to talk to some of the peasants waiting for me on the road, and we were just settling down on the hillside above when he tried to wrench himself free from the yokel holding him. He had caught sight of David, following with A. on his back, in the ravine below and was seized with a maniac desire to join him. I sprang to the rescue and for some very long minutes it was all we could do to stop him plunging down the hill, but when at last David arrived, he became once more quiet as a lamb.

We broke the 21-mile march at Jhang, my last stopping-place on the long ride done eighteen years ago.<sup>1</sup> The old travellers' book was still there with my name in it. The rest-house stands on a hillock and commands a fine view right away to the snows of Hazara and Amb. From Jhang to Fatehjang the road ran through open moorland country and at one point crossed hills clothed in wild olive—a good wood for ploughs. It's not too safe at night owing to the attentions of absconders from the Frontier, and an officer has just been detailed to blow up caves in which they hide. I have already mentioned the demand for arms.<sup>2</sup> Here, too, many soldiers are said to have brought back pistols and revolvers from the war, and some to have got rifles from across the Frontier.

*December 6—Fatehjang to Gali Jagir—10 miles*

Fatehjang boasts a hair-cutter and the day started with a much-needed visit from him, more needed, however, by the young than the old! His task was hardly finished when the Tehsildar appeared with the veterinary surgeon to have a look at our horses. They sat down by the fire while I breakfasted and we talked of cattle breeding. It has become the tract's most valuable industry, and the local Dhanni breed is so much improved that in time—perhaps in fifty years, it was said—it should become a pure breed. Most people still believe in the efficacy of spells and, when an animal is sick, it is taken off to the mullah to have a verse

<sup>1</sup> See *Rusticus Loquitur*, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> p. 29.

of the Koran recited over it. Not an expensive business, as the mullah charges only an anna a verse. The more intelligent go to the vet; the more cautious to both.

At the village (Taja Bara) at which we stopped on our way, when I gave them the usual greeting, 'Are you all happy?', the answer was 'There is great trouble', and out came a torrent of complaint about the scarcity of sugar, matches, oil and cloth. 'There is no shroud for the burial,' it was said, and only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  yards of cloth a head every three months. Grain, too, was becoming scarce owing to the poor autumn harvest. A Co-operative Sub-Inspector present said the state of the tenants was 'unspeakable'. One could not expect much precision of statement under these conditions, but inquiry into a number of cases showed that before very long an appreciable number would have to buy grain, which, as I have already noted, is no joke at present prices. They have had bad luck too with their fowls: as so often happens in India, an epidemic in the summer had overwhelmed them.

They knew no more about politics than yesterday's headmen. The most intelligent of them, the headman of the village, said the object of the League was to get for the Muslims their share of India and to prevent the Hindus becoming 'kings' over them. 'Mr Jinnah' he knew, but no one else on either side: 'We are illiterate and know nothing,' he said. Asked about the administration, he got as far as the Governor in Lahore, but had not heard of the Viceroy and could give no name to the King. Nor could anyone else. Again not much change since eighteen years ago.' But this cannot be blamed on the people: there is no school in the village, and the nearest is at Fatehjang five miles away.

On our arrival at Gali Jagir, a large impressive figure advanced to meet us. It was our host, my old and valued friend, the Sardar of Kot, one of the largest landowners in the Punjab, and, by common consent, the best.<sup>2</sup> We talked from one till five, and it was the most interesting talk I have had on this tour. Not much of it can be given here,

<sup>1</sup> cf. *Rusticus*, p. 309.

<sup>2</sup> cf. *ibid.*, p. 306.

but one thing he said about the political situation must be recorded. He was returned unopposed as an Independent and is one of the very few educated Muslims I have met whose judgement is still untouched by communal considerations. He urged the importance of naming a date for our departure—an early date, the earlier the better, since the present position was rapidly becoming intolerable. He would leave such matters as the Constituent Assembly to be dealt with after our departure. An Indian Government existed, and we should hand over to it. This, he hoped, would bring both parties to their senses, and if it didn’t, let matters, he said, be settled by civil war: there sometimes comes a point when a major operation is necessary. On hearing this, I was all ears, for as far back as June 1940 I had urged upon Amery the importance of naming a date for handing over—within a year, I suggested, of the chief political parties agreeing on a constitutional scheme—and since the interim Government became the *de facto* ruler of the country, something of this kind seemed more than ever the right policy.<sup>1</sup> We discussed the idea up and down, and at last the Sardar said: ‘The present situation has gone on too long: it is getting on my nerves, on other people’s too; it is time things came to a head.’

I told the Sardar how more than once on this tour—yesterday for example—I had been reproached for saying that we were proposing to hand over, the feeling being that the English alone stood for *insaf*—justice—and for incorruptibility. ‘Is this kind of thing’, I asked, ‘really meant, or is it just flattery?’ For instance, do people say the same sort of thing to you?’ ‘Yes, they do, but by *insaf* they mean not justice (its normal translation) but security, and you have certainly given India that.’ ‘Is it *right* then for us to go?’ I asked, thinking for the moment only of the peasant. ‘Might he not rightly feel that we were betraying him, throwing him in fact to the wolves of disorder?’ His reply was interesting: ‘There is no doubt that in the last twenty-five years the peasants have become less truthful; morality, too, has declined. How has this happened?’

<sup>1</sup> The late Sir Sikander Hyat-Khan (Premier of the Punjab) said to me in July 1939 that a definite date should be named if distrust was to be removed.

Because they have gone to the towns and picked up these faults there. But the same is true of the towns. Now, I ask myself, can these defects have come down to us from heaven? Are they not due to foreign domination? If so, should we not free ourselves from it and do this as soon as possible?'

It was with real feeling that we all bade the Sardar good-bye when he drove away after tea and left us to the enjoyment of his princely hospitality.

*December 7—Gali Jagir to Khaur—15 miles*

The most impressive figure we met today was a zaildar who rode with us over unending moorland accompanied by a mounted servant carrying a Winchester rifle of 1898. It was not merely his fine robust appearance—very characteristic of this district—which impressed, but also his intelligence and wide experience. The first war took him to Iran, Irak, Syria, Egypt and Greece, and he finally retired from the army in an honoured position after thirty years' service. The first grey hairs were just showing through the black, and a tinge of red in the black suggested that there had been an attempt to conceal the change.

Remembering what the Sardar had said about *insaf*, I waited for the word to be used by the zaildar, and I had not to wait long. Mention of a party given to the Governor when he visited the district was the occasion. The Tehsildars were given, by whom he didn't say, a list of people to be invited in return for a subscription of twenty rupees. He was not on the list, but instead of rejoicing in his luck, he was disgusted that a number of upstarts, many of them town Hindus, should have been included and he, the head of an old family with a fine record of service, omitted. That was his idea of *be-insaf*—injustice: and, if there was any idea of insecurity about it, it lay in the covert threat to his position.

He was full of the way men like himself suffered from the present trend of affairs. The rationing is in the hands of those who look after themselves and their friends, mostly traders; the savings movement started during the war was all done under official compulsion—I could well believe

this after what I saw during the first war ; corruption had increased with the large number of new officials ; Inspectors came from headquarters and asked no questions from ' those who suffered ' ; people ' of no house ' had all the power, and men of old family no longer had *izzat*.<sup>1</sup> There had not been all this trouble after the first war.

How often one has heard this kind of talk from men of the old school, and fine men too. Men of this type have enjoyed a privileged position under British rule, and to maintain it they have often had to work hard, and not always scrupulously, and they naturally feel a change which is gradually transferring power to others less privileged in the past and much less experienced in the handling of men and affairs. Nor do they see that the change is the inevitable outcome of British rule and its democratic trend. Whether the wheel won't come back full circle remains to be seen. If the times become dangerous, men of marked personality like the *zaildar* may well come to the fore again. Meanwhile tongue and pen rule rather than hand and sword. Only one good thing did he say of the present, and that with a touch of mockery. In answer to a question of A.'s he remarked that women, with their desire for new and better clothes, were now becoming ' a bit gentleman '. He continued to talk to us as we sat on a rock enjoying a picnic breakfast—we started at 7.30—but refused all but a banana.

After breakfast we turned into a village (Nathe) and there a tall dour-looking Moghul appeared with a hawk on his wrist. It had come from Tirah and cost Rs. 120 (£9) in Peshawar. It was one of the smaller kind used for hunting partridge and quail. The larger course cranes and hares and cost anything up to four or five hundred rupees. Large and small are tamed by keeping them awake day and night for a month—very much as the Shrew—' my falcon '—was tamed :

' If she chance to nod, I'll rail and brawl,  
And with the clamour keep her still awake.'

But nothing will tame the look in their black yellow-rimmed eyes, and this one looked at me like death.

<sup>1</sup> Social respect.



It was a pleasant change to turn to the weavers of the village, with whom we had much talk about their ancient craft, no longer moribund thanks to the shortage of machine-made cloth. Not that the weaver has it all his own way, for there is also a shortage of yarn, and when the allotted quota is exhausted, black market prices have to be paid for more. A large crowd gathered when they saw P. at work with his camera, all eager to be taken—all but one lady in whom age had at last conquered vanity. 'I am an old woman,' she said, 'there is no need to take my picture.' A. asked a mother of five which was the most sensible of her children and was told, 'All children are foolish'. But she got only laughter when she asked the men which they preferred in a woman—beauty or intelligence? Except from the zaildar, who replied: 'Intelligence is good, but who does not love beauty? Yet', he added reflectively, 'those who are far-sighted will prefer intelligence.'

On the Frontier almost no one waylaid me, but here the number is embarrassing. Amongst those who did this today were some tenants of a large landlord. They set up such a clamour as I passed that I could but stop and hear their tale. It was of the injustice of the bailiff, who, they said, had grossly over-estimated the yield of their millet crop<sup>1</sup> and robbed them accordingly. What the rights of the matter were I don't know, but on being told they had no grain left, I asked permission to enter a house, and one of the tenants was about to open the door, when his wife threw him a look which said unmistakably—don't let him in. And no wonder, for when I entered, I found a large bin full of millet and bags of it as well. Before that I had been shown a half-size chapati<sup>2</sup> and told it was one person's allowance for the midday dinner, with only one more to follow in the evening. They did not look half starved, as they must have done had this been true, but their clothes were in a deplorable state, due no doubt to the shortage of cloth. They were certainly poor, as was only too clear when I entered, yet cleanliness and neatness reigned. Everything had its appointed place, generally on a hook

<sup>1</sup> Great millet (*jowar*).

<sup>2</sup> A girdle-cake of unleavened bread.

on the wall, and at one end of the room thirty-three earthenware pots were stacked in three rows. The whole family of seven slept at night in the one room, with the door closed and the small glassless window shuttered to prevent the cold air penetrating the insufficient bedding.

*December 8—Khaur to Dhok Pathan—17 miles*

Our march today gave us a fine ride over wild broken country of grey naked rock, with small stunted trees standing like sentinels on the ridges. The metalled road stretched before us blue and smooth, rising or falling, coiling or uncoiling as it disappeared into the depths of a ravine or reappeared in the cleft of a hill. Hardly a village in sight and no one in the fields, and a universal silence, broken only by the sound of our horses' hoofs and of a rare lorry or car. There was a fine climax when, almost at the end of our march, we came to a canyon of bare rock, in the depths of which lay the sluggish Sohan, spanned by a bridge so simple and strong on its six piers that, modern though it is, it looked as primeval as its surroundings. Our rest-house lay on the edge of the river in a little oasis of green. For the horses it proved almost a paradise with finer grass and bedding than they have had anywhere else.

This afternoon an intelligent young ex-N.C.O. came to see me, who had thirteen years' military service to his credit though only thirty years old. He is the first of the many ex-soldiers I have met to show any interest in better farming and better living. He has bought two chaff-cutters—the first I have come across on this tour—planted pepper trees, sunk a well, secured improved varieties of seed, and started keeping accounts—all the result of what he has seen on service abroad, particularly in Palestine, where he visited two Jewish colonies. He looked one straight in the face with the quiet self-possession of a man accustomed to obey and be obeyed.

In the course of our long talk he said that the soldier returned to his village ready to work and turn his hand to anything, but above all set on cleanliness. Everything should be clean—person, house, child, food and clothes. Health would then be good and clothes would last longer,

for dirty clothes went quickly to pieces. The soldier's great handicap was his lack of capital, which made it difficult for him to embark on any new enterprise. Asked about the education of girls, for whom facilities are still wretchedly inadequate compared with those for boys, he said that the soldier wanted them educated, but what can one man do when neighbours all say no? That was why there were no girls in his village school. His own daughter was educated by her mother and now nurses her infants, as he put it, 'on time'. Education for his children is one of the two things the returned soldier wants more than anything else. The other is freedom. 'I am on both sides', was all he had to say about politics, and would that others were as wise.

Very different was the zaildar who followed. He hadn't an idea of what I meant when I asked whether he had ever listened to the radio, and when I repeated the question in a different form more than once, he finally replied, 'Yes, we have very old bones of animals here'. If I had not seen a recent note by the Commissioner that the zaildar had brought him some interesting fossils found in the neighbourhood, I should have been completely mystified. He evidently thought I too liked 'old bones'. After some further explanations (in the vernacular), he began talking of what sounded like 'ledu', then like 'lediu'. I was now the stupid one, for it was some time before it dawned on me that this was his way of pronouncing radio.

The day ended with one of the most exciting sunsets I have ever seen. The great cliffs of the canyon, lit up by flaming clouds in the west, looked redhot, as it might have been the walls of hell.

#### *December 9—Dhok Pathan to Talagang—16 miles*

A very different scene this morning when A. and I started climbing up the southern side of the canyon: all was cold and grey with a full moon sinking behind us. The metalled road before us climbed through goblin hills, at one point breaking into a vast amphitheatre where the Great Beug himself might have lodged. For seven of our sixteen miles we rode by village tracks across a very broken

country and for some time along the hard sandy bed of a stream clear as crystal but so shallow that our horses could get only a lick instead of a drink. But in the Punjab water always means green, and on either side we had young wheat with trees and Persian wheels.

Nothing could have looked more peaceful, but a Sikh kanungo with us said that in recent years many Hindu shopkeepers in these parts had become Sikhs in order to have the protection of a community well able to protect themselves. 'They are *bozdil*—craven-hearted—are they not banias?—and fear attack from the Muslims.' The Muslims, a Muslim commented, still remember the tyranny of the Sikhs when peasants who did not pay their land revenue were flung into the village pond in winter and kept there until they paid up. Which recalled another method of collecting taxes, practised in a well-known Indian State. 'There,' said a peasant living a few miles from its border, 'if you don't pay the land revenue, they put a boulder on your head.'

Every day we spend an hour or two in at least one village. Today's was a large one of 900 houses (Kot Sarang), and once more we had to listen to a tale of woe: three years of poor harvests, not enough seed for sowing the next, and 45 per cent of the cultivators, said the patwari, already having to buy bajra<sup>2</sup> at thirteen rupees a maund instead of the official eight rupees; and on the top of all this, of course, a shortage of cloth, sugar and matches. The Tehsildar and the Food Officer at Talagang corroborated these complaints<sup>3</sup> and seemed so powerless to remedy them that on reaching Talagang, at the risk of being thought a busybody, I sent High Authority a note on the subject. About one thing there was no complaint—namely, the Acts passed in the 'thirties to protect them from the money-lender. There are a hundred Hindu families in the village, and many of them used to do money-lending, but none of them is doing it now because nothing can be attached if a man defaults.

<sup>1</sup> And with good reason, for there were savage doings in the district in the following March. Nor were the Sikhs able to protect themselves against the superior numbers of the Muslims.

<sup>2</sup> Spiked millet.

<sup>3</sup> The Food Officer said that so far only 700 maunds of seed had been received for the tehsil and 2,000 more were needed immediately.

At this point there was a general stir, the kind that heralds the approach of a person of consequence, and a small clean-shaven Hindu appeared with a number of deferential followers. He was the Mahant<sup>1</sup> of the local shrine, but generally known in this Muslim tract as the Pir Sahib. About 500 years ago a famous Hindu saint left three disciples, each of whom became in time the Mahant of a shrine—one at Tilla in the Salt Range, another at Kabul, and the third here. Ever since, succession has passed from Mahant to disciple, as from father to son, and the spiritual kinship is no less. 'Yes, I still give charms to those who seek them, but only four annas in the rupee remains of my *dukandari*—my shopkeeping.' And pointing to his rough woollen cap, he said with a smile: 'In old days I wore silk on my head; but the people are now awake, and they are right. For each charm I used to write some verse from the Vedas, but that was devilry, and I got an unlawful advantage from it. Now I make only a mark, but it is all *gharbar*, *gharbar*—confusion, confusion.' He said this with such an engaging smile—a charm in itself—that everyone laughed sympathetically. And it recalled eighteenth-century Scotland. 'It is a trafficking with the Evil One' says Dominie Sampson in *Guy Mannering*. 'Spells, periapts, and charms are of his device.'

Long before we reached Talagang we saw the whole Salt Range stretched out before us from where Sakesar looks down upon the Indus almost to where Tilla gazes at the Himalayas. Still on our cross-country track, we passed through a village which had recently won the prize for being the cleanest in the tehsil. They had no reason to expect us, yet no village could have been cleaner, and the cattle are not even kept outside. No sweepers either, but all done by the peasant owners themselves, led by some sensible old soldiers. A clean village is always a pleasant sight, but this one had charm as well, for every second courtyard had a tree or two to shade it—far too rare a sight in the dry Punjab. We stopped at one point to admire two fine tamarisk trees growing inside a high outer wall.

<sup>1</sup> The head of a Hindu or Sikh shrine.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. 5.

Under one of them the owner, naked to the waist, was being shaved. Catching sight of us, he jumped up, threw a clout, not over his naked body but over his head—in India to cover the head is a mark of respect—and sprang to the wall to have a look at us ; and when we complimented him on his trees, he jumped over the wall to greet us. Not the kind of thing that would happen to one in a town !

The event of the day was a visit from another old Muslim friend, the son of a Nawab and the lord of a great estate on the banks of the Indus. I had not seen him since he came of age in the early 'thirties. The boy had turned into the man, a very good-looking man with manners to match. And how attractive are Indian manners at their best, with their happy mixture of dignity, courtesy and grace. We felt their charm to the full, for he had come ninety miles to see us !

Our talk at lunch—at which our excellent but rapacious cook excelled himself—was mainly about horses, of which the Nawabzada<sup>1</sup> has eighty in his stable, most of them with the racecourse in view. The most fantastic prices are being paid for likely fillies and colts and for good sires and dams. The first offspring of a mare bought for Rs. 500 sold for Rs. 30,000, and her second for Rs. 50,000 (£3,750). To me the best point about these high prices is that they draw away to the country, largely to the Punjab, some of the excessive wealth of the towns.

From horses we turned to public affairs. Communalism and corruption are the two cankers in the Indian body politic today and, like everyone else, he said corruption has never been so bad as it is now, especially amongst those charged with the rationing of millions of uneducated hungry folk. Of which he gave us a very good example from his own experience.

One of us remarked how often we had heard the fear of Russia mentioned on the Frontier. The Nawab said that in Mianwali, too, Russia was on people's lips, but the ordinary peasant's reaction to possibilities in that direction is to say : ' What can we do ? If Russia comes it is our fate.'

<sup>1</sup> Son of a Nawab.

There is at present much talk about the expropriation of the landlord, and in Bihar and the United Provinces definite measures are under discussion. As a large land-owner, the Nawabzada naturally had much to say on the subject, but he did not defend men who live in Lahore and not on their estates. Yet the landlord who leaves everything to his bailiff is not, he said, always a curse to the tenant, as the bailiff can be bribed. 'That may be all right for the tenant, but who will not agree with Cato 'that land is most grievously maltreated when its master does not direct what is to be done thereon but listens to his overseer'?'<sup>1</sup>

The Nawabzada was followed by the local hakeem, the seventh in his line to be a doctor, with a son who will be the eighth—such is the force of heredity and custom in India. He had a lean lanky figure and a red beard, and though half blind, sixty or seventy patients come to him daily, from places as far apart as Mianwali, Rawalpindi and Jhelum. He treats them on the Yunani system and, following Indian custom, charges only for medicines. I asked him what he valued most for compounding his drugs. The answer was: pearl for the heart, gold for the blood, and chicken essence for the lungs. 'The good man is he who works for his fellows', he quoted in Arabic, and the saying might well be applied to him.

## II—OVER THE SALT RANGE

### *December 10—Talagang to Balkassar—15 miles*

Sixty-six today and forty-two years since my first birthday in India. It has been a strenuous day beginning with a long slow march in the sun accompanied by a Tehsildar with whom I last rode as Commissioner fifteen years ago. On that occasion A., still a child, was learning to ride on a very bobbery little pony and was pitched off. Today P., who is also learning to ride, had his first fall and is shaken but undaunted. We were no longer riding south but eastwards with the long line of the Salt Range to our right.

<sup>1</sup> 'Nam illud vetus est Catonis agrum pessime mulcari, cujus dominus quid in eo faciendum sit non docet, sed audit vilicum.'—Columella, *De Re Rustica*, i. 2. Trs. H. B. Ash.

This evening from the roof of the rest-house we could see the whole range, and far away, beyond the Indus, almost beyond the sunset, we could just make out the Hills of Solomon.

On our way here I was waylaid by a little old lady, who begged me with the utmost earnestness to prevent the murderer of her husband getting off on appeal. The Sessions Judge has apparently condemned him to death, and only full execution of the sentence would satisfy her ; yet she had a kind attractive face. Perhaps she feared that, if he did not pay the Mosaic price, some member of her family would be obliged by tribal custom to act in place of the law. Death had come to her husband for paying too much attention to the murderer's wife, but there was no mention of that aspect of the case.

Today we passed from the Attock into the Jhelum district. A number of horsemen met us on the border, amongst them a white-bearded zaildar, the sight of whom made one feel quite young. He was eighty, and he had to be helped on to his horse ; but once in the saddle he showed himself more at home there than most of the younger men who have accompanied us. Asked whether things had been better or worse in his youth, he gave the expected reply : ' Far better. There was then more goodwill and more to eat.' ' And much less litigation ', said a dry-faced Subedar amongst the horsemen. It was a case of *crede experto*, for he is a confirmed litigant, fighting case after case with his landlords. The zaildar rode seven or eight miles with us, and the last I saw of him, after my arrival here, was his sturdy bearded figure riding gaily away to his village some miles to the north.

We were 6½ hours on the road, as we stopped for a long pow-wow on the roadside with the people of Dharobi, mostly Janjua Rajputs<sup>1</sup> and ex-service men. There was a large gathering, with chairs for ourselves and one or two others, string bedsteads for the officers, and the hillside for the rest. Gladly would we have shared the hillside with them all, but Indian village life demands a scrupulous observance of ' degree '. Most of the gathering stood, at

<sup>1</sup> For the Janjuas, see the author's *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 51.



first in a respectful circle, but closing in on me when we got on to rations. That set all tongues wagging. 'Officials come and go, but our stomachs are empty.' The patwari said that about 50 per cent of the inhabitants were having to buy their foodgrains; yet when I asked those who were doing this to step forward, only one or two did so. They, as usual, had had to buy 'in the black', and by all accounts most cultivators will have to buy grain before the next harvest is available.

The officers present were mostly men of the old school, who no doubt did admirable service in the field, but they had very little idea of what should be done at home; and this applied even to the youngest of them, a man of 35. The only serviceman who had anything to say was a N.C.O. who had been caught in the maelstrom of France's collapse and spent five years as a German prisoner. He had a sad depressed look but definite ideas as to what the countryside required: more machinery in the fields so that there should be less work (what about work for those displaced?), more education, and more medical aid—the nearest hospital is at Talagang eight miles away. But what he stressed most was that in France and Germany there was a proper ration system. 'Here we have no arrangement—we have these postcards,<sup>1</sup> but there they have a real book and every week they get all that is written in the book. Here some get, others don't.' Another difference was the way French and Germans farm. 'There they work without dirtying their hands. Work is done with "tracts" and many machines. Let us too have machines.'

Talk about politics brought the inevitable reference to *azadi*—freedom. The officers' spokesman said they didn't want it—'We are not fit for it'. 'But don't you want the English to go?' I asked. 'No, not for a hundred years', a remark greeted with a loud murmur of assent. And another officer added, 'The British are just by nature and they have the quality of kingship.'

There was more than an echo of this when we got to Balkassar, a striking looking village with an array of palatial

<sup>1</sup> Each family is told by postcard what it is entitled to.

PLATE III



Spectators (p. 42)



Gipsy encampment near Wah

PLATE IV



Veteran colonists (p. 81)

Waterlogged (p. 77)



The meeting on December 21 (p. 80)



houses, mostly the property of the large Khatri Sikh community, many of whom trade with Persia, exporting piecegoods and bringing back carpets, dried fruits and nuts. One of the most prosperous, a fine-looking elderly man with a long white beard, came to see me with two younger relatives. Sikh and Muslim, he said, had lived together in harmony, but now, with the cry for Pakistan, each eyes the other critically and keeps apart. 'We want the British to stay, otherwise we shall have to leave and go elsewhere.'

'But surely you want *azadi* ?'

'*Azadi*', said one of the younger men, 'is *bebadi*—destruction, and Pakistan is *kabaristan*—a graveyard.'

*December 11—Balkassar to Chakwal via Mureed—16 miles*

Since we turned east, on setting out, we now ride straight towards the sunrise. But more beautiful than either sunrise or sunset are dawn and dusk. Then the sky fills with clear and lovely colours—orange, red and green, says the tongue, but beyond words, say eye and mind. At one point we left the metalled road to visit Mureed, a large village built on the edge of a cliff overlooking a wide and empty torrent bed. In 1936, when I was last there, it was in danger of being washed away—five or six houses had already gone—and anti-erosion work had just been started to save it. For once, on returning to the past, I found progress. Much land had been recovered from the river bed, and a large grove of shisham trees<sup>1</sup> planted by the Forest Department had sprung up. Anti-erosion measures are the crying need of the district and have led to a new and popular form of co-operative society. As I walked away through the village, the headman, in reply to a question, said they had no wireless, 'and that is why we have no disturbances as in Bihar, for we hear nothing'. An answer worth pondering in these days of communal slaughterings.

Chakwal is a townlet of about 10,000 inhabitants and, like all townlets, dirty and depressing as few villages are. But it produced a remarkable *zaildar*, a Muslim and a Manhas Rajput. For over twenty years he has been a supporter of

<sup>1</sup> *Dalbergia sisu*.

the co-operative movement, which meant we had much in common. I began about the peasant's difficulties over sugar and cloth, but he brushed that aside: 'Those are trifles; what matters is the clash between Hindu and Muslim. But why have you come out? Some say it is to write a book, others that you want to know about the peasants, others that you have come on a "secret mission"'—the last two words in English. 'The first reason is right,' I replied, 'if I have the strength and God is kind. The second is also right, but the third is totally wrong.' He then launched out into oriental eulogy, ending by saying that when he entered the room, he left flattery outside the door! I felt inclined to say 'let's "cut the cackle and get to the horses."' And at last we did.

'People tell you', he continued, 'that they want the English to stay—to stay for a hundred years' (yesterday's remark had evidently got round). 'That is false, entirely false. Everyone wants freedom, everyone who is educated. Ninety per cent of English officers now are *na-laik*—unsuitable. They must go. We want the English to help us but it must be as between equals.' In this year's election he stood as a Unionist, and like most Unionists was defeated by a Leaguer. Now he would like to join the League and would do so if only Khizar<sup>1</sup> would. He was going to Lahore and would try to persuade him to do this, but Khizar was great and he was small. Finally he begged me to tell the Viceroy that 'he must give up favouring the Hindus at the expense of the Muslims'. One more example of the way each side thinks H.M.G. is favouring the other.<sup>2</sup>

### *December 12—Chakwal to Ghoa Saidan Shah—21 miles*

Twenty-one miles is not an excessive march for a horse in good condition—Arthur Young often did more than this in France and Trelawny's 'usual day's travel' in Italy was 'from thirty-five to forty-five miles'<sup>3</sup>—but much depends on climate, country and horse. The last twelve miles were

<sup>1</sup> Sir Khizar Hayat Tiwana, then Premier of the Punjab.

<sup>2</sup> cf. p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> E. J. Trelawny, *Recollections of Shelley and Byron*, p. 169 (1858 edition).

hilly and stony and we had to go slowly, especially as none of our horses has yet acquired that invaluable quality—a fast walk. A fast walk, a steady comfortable trot, and sound legs are the three things most needed in a horse for a tour of this kind. Our trio have still to find their feet, but so far we can't complain: in eighteen days they have carried me (and often A., and sometimes P.) 275 miles with only two days' halt.

Since Talagang the Salt Range has bounded our southern horizon, and the last two days we have been riding along its northern flank, but always at some distance from it. Today we turned south again, and every mile brought us nearer its stony serrated hills—very blue in the early sunlight. There is always a touch of excitement in approaching hills from the plain, and our horses seemed to feel it too, for they stepped out with a new briskness.

The first person we overtook on the solitary road was a grey-bearded peasant, who was on foot and moving along at a good four miles an hour. He left Mandra (on the Grand Trunk Road) yesterday morning at daybreak and reached Chakwal, forty miles on, a little after dark, having eaten nothing on the way. 'The day was spent (*rahegya*) when I was three miles from Chakwal.' He said he was 55 but looked at least ten years older. At Chakwal he stayed at an 'hotel', where he got a night's lodging for twelve annas and a dinner of meat, pulse and chapati for nine annas. Before leaving this morning he had tea and biscuits—another ten annas, making just under two rupees (three shillings) for bed, breakfast and dinner. 'Which do you prefer, buttermilk or tea?' I asked him, wishing to compare old ways with new. 'Buttermilk is good; what is tea?' he said scornfully. He was a Rajput (a Khokar) and though an ordinary peasant proprietor with only eight acres, he had that indefinable dignity which the old often have in the village but rarely in the town.

Almost everyone we met on the road was a soldier and gave us a soldier's salute. But one person did this who proved to be a mere civilian like myself, and when I asked why he did it, he said with a laugh, '*Society ka tarab*—it is society's way'. In the village 'society's way' dominates;

on the Frontier, Hindus wear not the Hindu *dhobi* but the Muslim *paijama*, and only the other day I took a Hindu patwari for a Muslim because, Muslim fashion, he had clipped his moustache under his nose.

When I last rode to Choa in '37, the Chakwal tehsil had a bad reputation for morals. 'The men are very debaucherous and catch up girls' someone said to me, speaking of certain large landowners. Murder is still common, and in 90 per cent of the cases the cause is woman. A soldier on returning from the war heard that his two sisters had erred. He killed them both and then surrendered himself to the police. Which recalled a Sunday afternoon forty years ago when a Baluch peasant was brought before me who had just given himself up after killing with his axe wife and paramour caught *flagrante delicto*. But this kind of thing is no bar to martial ardour, and the whole area has the finest possible record for military service, of which the following petition given me at Talagang by a veteran of the first war is a typical example :

With due respect I beg to offer a few lines for your kind consideration. That on the beginning of war, as it was declared by the Government of India that Father of three or more sons serving in the war will be granted land awards. On this declaration I had sent all of my sons numbering six in the war. Moreover I myself had also served in the great war. I have got medal. Now the people of this area says that you have given six sons in the war and what the Government have given you ? I therefore earnestly request that the grant of land may be made. I am very poor man and have not got sufficient land to pull on.

Everyone I ask agrees that the returned soldier is more awake, but it is only the officer (like the N.C.O. we met at Dhok Pathan) who has any definite ideas about the future. All want education for their boys, as they saw during the war that it was the educated soldier who 'gets jumps'. A few, not many it is said, are keen on it for their girls, though 'the wind is blowing that way too'. The second thing they want, says an Assistant Registrar of Co-operative Societies, is more and better roads ; and the third, facilities for embarking in trade and industry. 'They feel left behind very much.' Some of the more educated, who read the papers, say, 'If we were free, we would march on

South Africa’! There is ‘a wave of desire’ for freedom, due to what they have seen in other countries, but they are very vague as to how they will be better off when they are free; they just feel that this will be so. They don’t take kindly to farming on their return and are inclined to gad about spending their savings and going to the cinema. One soldier told me he preferred soldiering as it wasn’t such hard work and ‘one can only die once’, and this attitude is more general than that of the soldier-philosopher who said, ‘Whatever work one has that is best’.

One curious result of the war, noted by the Sardar of Kot, is that many took to knitting and, owing to the shortage of clothes, others are imitating them and making jerseys, socks and balaclava caps. Incidentally the Sardar thought that the soldiers of the first war had suffered a more violent change than those of the last. A very large number of the latter had never left India, and in their case the only important change was acquiring a higher standard of living.

As we rode, we were waylaid again and again by officers, other ranks, headmen and peasants, drawn up by the roadside in long lines headed by some medalled veteran, one of whom had joined the army in ’92. They all had the same complaint—the complaint that has run like a telegraph wire all along our road the last sixty or seventy miles. ‘We have nothing to eat, we are dying of hunger, there is no sugar, no cloth, no matches. Look at our children, how ragged they are! Our lot is unbearable.’ And so on with every possible variation on these simple but absorbing themes. No one, of course, was dying of hunger, and many were tolerably well dressed; but those whose stores are exhausted have to purchase millet or gram at formidable prices, which must sooner or later make a big hole in the reserves accumulated during the war.

How many are doing this it is impossible to say at all accurately without a house to house inquiry. But some are better judges than others, and the best judge is the patwari, who commonly knows the three or four villages in his charge as a hand its glove. The lowest estimate given me by any of them since Khaur is 45 per cent, which, even if heavily discounted, suggests that at least one out of every



three or four of the population is doing this. Most of them, no doubt, are village servants who would be doing so in any case, but a headman was amongst those who said he had run out of grain. Owing to a poor monsoon the tract is faring even worse than the country round Talagang, so much so that a patwari, who seemed experienced and reliable, said that in ten or fifteen days 80 per cent of the people in his four villages would have to buy their food, and most of them will have to do this 'in the black' at rates at least 50 per cent higher than the controlled prices, and those in all conscience are high enough. One wonders whether in the village control doesn't do more harm than good. The educated, the influential and the dishonest do well enough, but 'poor Periwinkle pays for a'.<sup>1</sup>

The local Sub-divisional Officer, a Hindu, scouted the suggestion that people could not get their 8 oz. ration of wheat at the controlled price of Rs. 10/1 a maund. Yet two zaildars whom I met shortly afterwards both said quite a number had to buy 'in the black' at Rs. 20 a maund. The S.D.O. did, however, agree that 8 oz. a day was quite insufficient for men who had to work in the fields. It is apparently assumed that they can make it up with millet, but there is very little millet to be had. All agree that, if sufficient grain is not imported in the course of the next fortnight, there will be sheer starvation, for round Choa 70 to 80 per cent<sup>2</sup> are already having to buy their food instead of the normal 40 per cent at this time of year.

Hearing all this one feels very critical of the system evolved at Headquarters. It puts enormous power into the hands of the distribution staff, and this explains why two departments, which shall be nameless, are no longer reputed the most corrupt in a very corrupt province. This 'bad eminence' is now universally accorded to the Food Supply Department and their satellite traders who, controlling the very basis of life, exploit their neighbours

<sup>1</sup> Thumbikin, Thumbikin broke the barn,  
Foreman, Foreman stole the corn,  
Middleman, Middleman stood and saw,  
Thirdman, Thirdman ran awa'  
And poor Periwinkle paid for a'.

<sup>2</sup> The Tehsildar put it at 80 to 85 per cent.

to the full, as they once did with their money-lending. At Dudial, a large village of the neighbourhood, where there is no official to watch what is going on, you can get anything you like.<sup>1</sup> You have to pay for it of course, in the case of cloth four or five times the controlled price. Estimates vary as to the amount of cloth that finds its way to ‘the black’. No one puts it at less than 20 per cent, and some go as high as a third. Even 20 per cent is a serious matter for the poor, who are the victims, for even when they get a quarter’s ration it is only two yards a head, and for a single outfit over twenty yards are required for a man, and over forty for a woman. The townsman of course gets more—three yards a head; more sugar, too—24 oz. a head instead of four. The excuse is that the villager eats gur rather than sugar, but how is he to get gur if, as all along our route since Wah, no cane is grown and gur has to be imported at twice the price of sugar? That is a question which has perhaps not occurred to those who sit in offices in Lahore!

But I am getting infected with the general atmosphere of complaint; nor can I do anything to relieve the palpable hardships. When I said this to the people of Thirpal, explaining that I was no longer in service, A. overheard someone say (not in English): ‘Yet where the river has flowed, its mark will remain.’ Whether this is a compliment or an insult depends on the river!

A Co-operative Inspector was riding with me, and I asked him what he considered the best quality of the Punjabi. It varied, he said, from one part of the Punjab to another, but in the north it was his reliability: ‘He is a man of his word; *bat se nahin phirta*—he does not stray from it. When he says a thing, he does it.’

‘They are also good at flattery,’ I said a little mischievously, remembering yesterday’s zaildar.

‘God too must be flattered,’ he retorted; ‘is it not written in the Koran that one must do him worship?’

Arrived at the foot of the hills, our horses had a hot arduous climb with bare red rock on either side. But when

<sup>1</sup> The shopkeepers of Dudial suffered severely in the disturbances which followed in March, at the hands of the Muslim peasants of the neighbourhood.

we entered the upland valley leading to Choa, water flowed along our road, sparkling in the sunshine, autumn leaves shone green and gold, and sylphlike trees, a-tiptoe on the rocks, looked as if they had just parachuted down from heaven. The weedless fields of emerald wheat and the well-shaped embankments, holding up soil and moisture, showed the peasant at his best. At one precipitous point, with the help of five or six enormous retaining walls, small terraced fields had been made rivalling the orange and lemon terraces overhanging the Mediterranean at Amalfi. The villages on vantage points above the valley recalled the Arab dwellings in the hills round Jerusalem. A novel sight, to me at least, was two chimneys rising high above the flat roofs, but neither was smoking, and did they ever smoke? I wondered. Here at Choa, where clouds of Madonna-blue smoke used to drift up the hillside from the village below, there are only thin wisps, due perhaps to the fuel shortage. There are changes, too, in the rest-house. Gone are the muslin curtains, the invaluable waste paper basket, and the one wine glass of sixteen years ago.<sup>1</sup> Gone, too, are *The Mill on the Floss* and *The New Republic*, leaving only a few tattered novels and French magazines. But the beauty of the spot remains. The loquats are in flower, and the air in garden and grove is full of their rich scent. Above all the burn is as limpid and musical as ever.

### *December 13—Halt*

This afternoon we revisited the glen, in whose waters I first bathed in '05. That, too, is changed. Trees have been cut down, and the large black pool, where one could swim in sylvan secrecy, is now bare to the sky and its surface green with weed. Instead a small pumping station waters a young orchard of pear, peach, pomegranate and almond. Undeterred, we went farther down the glen and bathed where man has not yet laid his progressive hand.

### *December 14—Choa Saidan Shah to Pind Dadan Khan—15 miles*

Much conversation here with men of different type and position. The most interesting was an Assistant Registrar,

<sup>1</sup> See *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 55.

an old friend, who accompanied me for eleven days on a previous riding tour. He is an intelligent Muslim, whose twenty years' service in different parts of the Punjab have given him a wide knowledge of rural conditions in the province. I asked him what was the biggest change he had seen in these twenty years. Much more self-respect, he said, a slow change with the women but with the spread of education going a little faster. 'And what is the *worst* change you have seen?' 'Women going unveiled is commonly thought the worst.' 'But what do *you* think?' The A.R. thought so too, because it has affected morals, and he quoted a verse by Akbar Allahabadi, an Urdu poet who died about fifteen years ago. In literal translation it runs :

The girls are taking sides,  
The Muslims have found a new way to progress,  
The tamasha will reveal a startling scene  
Once the veil is lifted.

This brought us to purdah. Though the A.R.'s wife has been educated up to the Middle standard, she is in purdah, and so willingly that even when she goes out for a walk in a solitary place she won't unveil. Very different from what the Muslim Sub-Divisional Officer of ten years ago told me about his daughters. Their mother was a stern adherent of tradition and never went out without her burqa.<sup>1</sup> Hearing that her daughter-in-law in Lahore had discarded it, she had her brought to her house to stop this backsliding. But she had three sons—all educated, one to the point of trying for the I.C.S.—and one day they took their sister-in-law and their two sisters out for a non-burqa walk. Learning of the escapade the mother rounded indignantly on the father: 'These children are not of my womb.' 'But purdah is not enjoined in the Koran,' he objected. 'That is not to be believed,' she said indignantly. 'My mother never went out without a burqa, nor did my grandmother and her mother before her. What was right for them is right for us.' Meanwhile the sons had locked themselves into a room—partly sulks, partly fear of their

<sup>1</sup> A white cotton cloak with hood concealing the wearer from head to foot, but with eye-holes in the hood.

father. He dealt mercifully with them and said they could do as they liked when on tour with him, but at headquarters they must do as their mother wished. The curious thing is that all three brothers have married educated women—one of them is a B.A., B.T. (Bachelor of Teaching)—yet their wives all wear the burqa, and a married sister, who is a B.A., does the same. When I asked one of the brothers why they did this, it might have been his own mother replying: 'Because it is asked by Islam.' Yet he admitted that purdah was bad for health. 'And what about the mind?' 'When the body is not healthy, how can the mind be?' was the candid reply.

If one is to live in purdah without losing health, one must obviously not neglect the household tasks which exercise the body. The S.D.O.'s wife keeps herself fit by spinning and by churning the butter. 'When I do not churn, I don't feel easy', she would say. Her daughters would do neither, preferring to toy with embroidery, which, as their highly practical father said, is of no use to anyone. He urged them to play badminton instead, but in vain. 'It's no good,' they said; 'when mother sees us doing a thing like that, the wrinkles rise to her forehead.' Before this last war, if there was a clash between old and young, the young deferred to the old. But now 'a new wind blows' and the old find themselves having to defer to the young. When this afternoon I asked the Assistant Registrar and his Inspector, also a Muslim, on which side they stood, both said—on the side of the new generation. 'How can you say that', I asked, 'when you are both in favour of purdah?' The A.R. admitted the soft impeachment and said that on that point he was with the old, but the Inspector claimed that purdah was a matter of religion and that religion was not a matter of new or old.

If the war has had any influence on village life, it is in the northern Punjab, where men enlist by the thousand, not just for a living, but in obedience to gallant martial tradition. What was the effect of this on domestic life? I asked. 'You will not see a single woman here with a nose ring,' replied the A.R. 'Their ears, too, used to be pierced in half a dozen places, so many ornaments did they

wear ; in Gujranwala the older women have a dozen holes. Now women tend to have one gold earring in each ear ; this is because it is more beautiful.' Dress too is changing. Country shoes are discarded for ' heeled shoes ', and ' the loin cloth ', as the A.R. called the traditional *tehmad* skirt, for the shalwar or voluminous trouser. ' The shalwar is more honourable : one has to keep guard with the *tehmad*.'

Another change is the increased use of crockery. Everyone now drinks tea and requires a tea set. Hence the rows of tea pots in the Chakwal bazaar, something I had not seen before, and suggesting a possible new industry for the village potter. As on the Frontier, general tea-drinking began after the first war and is becoming a tax on the family budget. One soldier with a wife and two children said they drank it twice a day with milk and gur and each ate a *paraunta*<sup>1</sup> with it. He put the cost at twelve annas a day, and a headmaster I met on the road put it at ten annas, while a Frontier Pathan with a lively imagination said : ' Put the cost of food and clothes into one scale and of tea into another and the two will balance.' The lowest estimate is two annas a head. The headmaster thought the habit a bad one—' it makes men weak '—but one rustic said, ' I cannot even walk until I have drunk tea ', and others that when they did not drink it, they got headaches and constipation. But whatever its effects and cost, the habit has undoubtedly come to stay and is spreading southwards from the more martial to the less martial areas.

After an early lunch we bade sorrowful farewell to Choa's fragrant groves and crystal streams. Not so our driver : ' Will these hills never end ? ' he exclaimed to A. and P. sitting beside him. For a truck the hills were at first disagreeably steep, but when the road had climbed to its highest point, suddenly—there at our feet, nearly 2,000 feet down, lay the great plain—the plain of the Five Rivers—grey, green and blue, stretching away to a milk-white horizon. To the eye the descent was almost perpendicular, but the metalled road slithered down in black coils through blood-red hills. Famous salt mines have been hewn and

<sup>1</sup> Girdle-cake of unleavened bread fried in ghi : *paraunta* in Punjabi, *paratba* in Urdu.

blasted out of their goblin bowels and provide most of northern India with salt. This is taxed, and more nonsense has been talked about the tax than about any other tax in the world. It is 'an intolerable burden on the poor', the Nationalist has said for years. Yet it amounts to less than four annas a head a year. During the whole of my service I never once heard a villager complain of it, and the A.R. and his Inspector both said the same. Very different is the case with land revenue! But the abolition of the salt tax long ago became a battlecry against 'the Satanic Government'. If any change is needed, why not earmark it to relieve the peasant's real burdens?<sup>1</sup>

The steepness of the road and the smoothness of its surface made the ten-mile descent a perilous affair for our horses, and we walked most of the way. An added peril was the camel. As already noted, David has only to see a camel to panic, and at a sharp corner, where the open road edged a precipice, we met a long string of them and it was all I could do to prevent him backing over the edge. Before the descent began, we were waylaid by two peasant owners, one of them a headman. It was to make the usual complaint—not enough wheat, even for the sowing, and great injustice by the local 'deepot-holder' in the distribution of grain, sugar and cloth. My companions having fallen behind, the two peasants came as close as they could to my horse and, looking up at me, inveighed in a half whisper but with the utmost earnestness against those responsible. 'All black men eat bribes—give us Englishmen, they alone do not do this. Many get nothing; *we* get nothing because we are neither League nor Congress: we are Unionists.' No accent of flattery about this, but all said in the tone of men half mad with injustice. These are some of 'the millions of humble folk' who, to quote Churchill's speech in the House read this evening, 'now stand in jeopardy, bewilderment and fear'. Which recalled the young soldier just back from the eastern border of Bihar, whom we met on the way to Choa. Fifty thousand

<sup>1</sup> It has since been abolished, but according to a Press cable dated New Delhi, 28.7.47, 'last week Mahatma Gandhi observed that although the tax on salt has been removed, the result was that it had probably become more costly and more difficult to get'. It has now been re-imposed in Pakistan (Ordinance dated 16 January 1948).

Muslims murdered there, he said—a mass affair ;<sup>1</sup> and he added, the same could happen here the other way round. The people were ready to explode, but the administration was better, so he hoped all would be well.

Cultivation in the Salt Range is largely based upon terraces supported by stone walls, often, as I noted two days ago, of great height. The headman, an Awan, had won nearly half an acre from the hillside by making three of these walls, one of them ten feet high, and all recently repaired and strengthened with his own hand. No one could accuse these hillmen of laziness. The ever-increasing pressure of population on a people ignorant of birth control is making them work harder than ever, and the harder they work the less fatalistic they become. They see that man can help himself as well as depend upon God.

The last mile or two to the rest-house the sky in the west was as blood-red as the hills. I remembered the rest-house as one of the worst in the province, but the Tehsildar had completely transformed it by a lavish introduction of rugs, carpets and deep armchairs, and he is not the first to pay this kindly disinterested attention to one who is now *functus officio*. Even more welcome was the presence of a washerman, who must have gasped when he saw what had to be washed within the next twenty-four hours. A pile of newspapers—every night we go newsless to bed—also greeted us and were devoured by P. and ignored by A.

*Sunday, December 15—Pind Dadan Khan to Samblanwala Canal Rest-house (near Miani)—6 miles*

For us who rode it was our shortest march, but for the truck it was one of the longest. The Jhelum—the first of the Five Rivers<sup>2</sup> which give the Punjab its name—had to be crossed, a matter of no difficulty for horses with the river sucked almost dry by the two great canals which it feeds ; but its wide sandy bed is impassable for a truck.

<sup>1</sup> The figure given by Sir Stafford Cripps in the House of Commons on almost the same date was 5,000. But the exact, or even approximate, number is unknown.

<sup>2</sup> Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej.



Fortunately there was a railway bridge not far away, so off it went by rail to Malakwal. There for some hours it stuck for want of coolies to detrain it, and it did not reach us till nearly four. We are now out of the hills and on to the plain, the plain that stretches southwards to Delhi and beyond.

## Chapter III

### TO THE CHENAB AND BEYOND

#### I—TO THE CHENAB

*December 16—Samblanwala to Fakhirian—12 miles*

I hate plains, as I hate bores—one cannot get away from either. But the Punjab plain is not boring. It has the most virile peasantry in India, and perhaps the most prosperous in Asia, and it has the finest irrigation system in the world, fed by its five rivers. Fifty years ago this end of the plain was a semi-desert, the home of the easy-going Jangli, who lived less by plough and sickle than by camel and cattle. Now, thanks to the Lower Jhelum canal and its ramifications, the plough is paramount, and turnip, cotton and cane and here and there an orchard are added to the ubiquitous wheat. In the wake of the canal have come industrious peasants from other parts of the province, but bringing with them the interlocking of Muslim and Sikh, which makes the Punjab the thorniest of India's political problems.

Canal colonies, with their greater wealth, are usually better equipped with school and hospital than other areas, but our route is taking us along the border of two districts—Shahpur and Gujrat—and border villages are apt to be forgotten at headquarters. This may explain why Mona and its 1,800 inhabitants, some of whom gathered to meet us, have only a primary school. The nearest Middle school is six miles away (at Miani), so too the nearest hospital. In Mona itself the only medical treatment to be had is from an Imam,<sup>1</sup> who acts as doctor and chemist. His only qualification is a six months' course at the Yunani Medical College in Delhi, plus some teaching from his father, who was also a hakeem, as was his father before him. As Imam he also teaches some of the young to read the Koran in Arabic, and it is a little piquant to find an Awan doing this

<sup>1</sup> The person who conducts the prayers at a mosque.

service to the children of Seyeds, who claim direct descent from the Prophet.

The atmosphere at our meeting was one of subdued decorum until clothes were mentioned. Then every tongue seemed unloosed, and for half an hour I listened to a tempest of protests. The people became so desperate two months ago that they sent a deputation to Gujrat to beg the authorities for their share of cloth. But 'there was no hearing', and back they came the poorer by fifty rupees. Seven of those present said they had not had a stitch since April. What the rights and wrongs of it are, who can say just riding through? But everyone I meet agrees that in matters of supply corruption is general—'legalized robbery' one official called it. Yet how careful one must be not to accept complaints without check. When I inquired whether anyone was buying grain for food, 'Many, many,' was the reply; but when I asked those who were doing this to step forward, only one person did so. Undaunted, the headman shouted to some onlookers at a distance to come along. The patwari said only about 10 per cent were having to buy—very different from last week, and not surprising for we are now in a country with an assured water-supply.

What will men not give for water in this dry Punjab! The harnessing of its rivers is Government's attempt to satisfy the demand, but nature resents interference and will always hit back if she can. In this case the result is water-logging and the appearance of salts<sup>1</sup> on such a scale that over half a million acres can no longer be cultivated, and the area is increasing every year. The beginnings of this devastating process can be seen round Mona, and this was the second subject to set tongues going. It is not difficult to find out where the village shoe pinches, if the pinch is sharp. Here it was sharp enough with 550 acres of their land already affected. It was not surprising that with little to sell they didn't like the high prices. 'They are bad for us: the poor are killed by them,' they exclaimed.

I have been hearing a good deal about the decline in the respect for authority.<sup>2</sup> I noticed, therefore, with interest

<sup>1</sup> Sodium salts, especially carbonate.

<sup>2</sup> cf. p. 24.

that when half-way through our meeting the Naib-Tehsildar<sup>1</sup> appeared, all rose and remained standing until he was seated. But psychologically this tract is much as it has always been.

Riding on, we stopped at a canal bridge to water our thirsty horses. It happened to lead to the Mona Remount Depot. Goliath, who comes from these parts, knew this, and also how good the oats and grass are there; but I didn't, and when I was trying to re-bit his stubborn mouth, he suddenly decided he would like to revisit old haunts, and before I knew what had happened I was being dragged along across the bridge, hanging on for dear life to the bridle round his neck. He was too strong for me and would have got away had not the Naib-Tehsildar on the other side gallantly seized the bridle and hung on to it, until sheer weight and pull brought him to a full-stop.

I visited another village (Miani Gondal) in the evening, and it was in much happier state: no waterlogging, ample holdings, and consequent affluence. The affluence could not be doubted. Before the war there were no fruit-sellers and only four goldsmiths for a population of 8,000. Now there are four fruit-sellers and nine goldsmiths. Over a hundred bicycles, too, against seventy before. But such is the nature of the Jangli, who fifty years ago lived mainly by herding his own cattle and stealing other people's, that the Middle school has become a Lower Middle. Compulsory education was introduced, but the headmaster submitted to local pressure, and the order became a dead letter. Not so easy to educate the peasant as some people think! Yet without education, when money flows in, it flows out in litigation and show. It is characteristic of these semi-graziers that they buy their vegetables from a village of hardworking Sikhs rather than grow them themselves. 'Say something in our favour,' exclaimed someone to the Inspector sitting at my side, when point after point came out against them. One point which some at least would count to their credit is that at the last election they voted Unionist. When asked the difference between League and Congress, they said, 'We don't bother about

<sup>1</sup> The Deputy Tehsildar.

that,' and only one person attempted to explain what was meant by Pakistan. 'Our area', he said, 'must be separate, and the Hindu area must be separate.'

*December 17—Fakhran to Jholpur—13 miles*

Today again we were amongst Janglis, only here and there passing a village of colonists. The colonist is very suspicious of the Jangli, and in the colony village we visited no Jangli is allowed to stay after sundown. That's because he is an expert cattle-thief. Cattle-thieving is his chief sport, and from his earliest years he is taught to regard it as an art. It is only when he has shown that he can steal with skill without being caught that he is given his first puggree. Until then he must go bare-headed.

The Jangli has also a taste for faction and fighting. Yesterday we passed a narrow channel, which was the agreed boundary line between two rival factions. One day recently three or four of one faction were caught on the wrong side of the line and were immediately attacked. They took to their heels and one of them was killed by a flying shot. In today's village a member of the family, whose house A. visited, had been murdered by an enemy and the murderer acquitted. Would there be further murder? asked A., knowing well what tribal custom demanded. 'He has gone away,' was the noncommittal reply.

Where men are given to violence, courage and daring are the indispensable qualities and, as at Sparta, young men must show some sign of them to be of any account. This sometimes has curious results, as the following story shows. There were two brothers, and one said to the other, 'My son is of age, let him marry your daughter.' The other said he must consult his wife. The wife said, 'He has shown no courage yet,' and refused her assent. Hearing this, the son waylaid a village bania trotting back one evening after a day's shopping in town and first thrashed him and then stole his pony. His father at once reported him to the police. Pressed to explain his not very paternal action, he confessed that his son had done it to obtain 'a certificate of courage' to enable him to marry, and he begged them to

prosecute him and give him a few days' imprisonment, then everything would be in order for the wedding. The case was compromised, the bania compensated, and the son wed. Faction counts for so much in the tribal life of these people that the young men refused to enlist during the war in case it weakened their side. To meet the difficulty, it was suggested that equal numbers should go from each side—like M.P.s pairing!

Today's village had a much healthier atmosphere than yesterday's. With only 500 inhabitants it was far smaller, and that in itself is an advantage. But its great asset was the headman, a veteran Subedar of the Great War. With ten other officers he was given a grant of fifty acres for his services during the war, but he is the only one of the eleven to live here and so takes the lead. He has shown his worth by starting a private school and getting a crippled patwari to run it, and significantly, when we got on to the vexed subject of cloth, there was not the usual cataract of complaints amongst the forty or fifty people present. All seemed to have had their fair share of the meagre supply available—'barely enough to bind up a wound,' said a cynic. A Hindu shopkeeper who was present does the distribution, and he was evidently on good terms with the village. 'We are one life,' said a fine-looking peasant with large nose and moustache; with a sense of humour, too, for when later on he said something disparaging about Hindu money-lenders and I reminded him of his remark, he retorted, 'We may be one life, but we are two stomachs'.

Relations between Hindu and Muslim led to questions about politics. They had all voted for the League. 'We know the League but nothing beyond' was the only reply at first to the usual question, which, however, was not put to the Subedar. But when the Inspector said we were all brothers here and they could speak their minds without fear, even though the Naib-Tehsildar was present, someone said reassuringly, 'Our heart doesn't palpitate when we say anything,' and the peasant with the large nose and moustache came out with a clear though brief exposition of the League's policy. 'If Hindus have leaders, Muslims must also have leaders: we don't want Hindus to rule us.'

The Subedar endorsed this : ' The Hindu keeps the Muslim at a distance. If a Muslim has something in his hand, the Hindu will not eat it. How can there be unity when they do this ? ' The Naib-Tehsildar said afterwards, the idea had spread that the British Government was against the League—one remembers the meeting near Shewa<sup>1</sup>—and that was why there was some fear at first of saying anything in its favour. It's not easy to get quickly into the peasant's mind, and that's why I refuse to be hurried when visiting a village.

This village has not been well served by Government. In spite of the importance of cattle in the tract, the nearest veterinary dispensary is ten miles away, and the nearest stud bull twenty miles, and but for the Subedar's private school there would be no school within two miles. The school is a good example of self-help, and of the kind most congenial to the Indian village. Everyone who sends a child to it pays the schoolmaster one rupee a month and gives him twenty seers (41 lb.) of grain a year. The Hindus give him his 'daily bread', and the Subedar his milk. Twenty-five boys go to school, but not a single girl. 'There is eagerness, but no arrangement. There is also no custom. Girls learn the Holy Koran, that is the custom.'

Yet another example of self-help is the watch and ward done to protect the village at night. The villagers take it in turns, four at a time, two for the first watch and two for the second, and each man's turn comes round every ten or twelve days—very like our fire-watching system during the war.

Two more veterans came to see me in the afternoon. One had enlisted in '97 and spent five years in China ; the other had taken part in London's Victory Parade in 1919. He related how one of their party on his way to Glasgow in a car had dropped a handkerchief, characteristically used as a purse for a one-pound note. He had hardly got back to Hampton Court, where he was quartered, when handkerchief and note were restored by the police. 'That is a great difference between your country and ours. There is not that honesty here.' Would he say the same of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 18.

England today ? I wondered. The veteran of '97 deplored the way things were going in India. 'Freedom—yes, we want it. But what is freedom without justice ? Now there is no justice.'

'How is it things have changed ?'

'I do not know. Under the Great Queen there was justice ; under Edward VII there was also justice ; under George V there was a little less. Now, I do not know how it is, things are different. Each thinks of himself and his family ; there is no thought of others.' Is the reason, perhaps, that with the great increase of population the struggle for existence is keener, and, in the Punjab at least, sharpened by the higher standard of living ?

*December 18—Jholpur to Bakhwala—16 miles*

A long ride through flat uninteresting country poorly cultivated, the inhabitants still mainly Janglis, who care little for crops like cane which demand sustained hard work. We spent two hours or so at one of their villages (Buch Kalan), and there was a big attendance of friendly uncouth people. They greeted us with the explosion of a cannon crasher, which made our horses jump, and rows of white teeth appeared in laughter at the shake it gave our tempers and seats. There was the usual uplifting of voices when we got on to cloth, but the only people who complained that they had had none were village servants. The controls, however beneficial to the well-to-do, are of little use to the poor. The distribution is done by a committee of seven, one from each ward—generally the most important person in it—and the village servants, who are probably 30 to 40 per cent of the population, are unrepresented. A shoemaker said his thumbmark was taken on his ration card in token of receipt, but he got nothing ; another that, though entitled to 25 per cent of his quota in 'fine cloth', he got only ordinary cloth. And so on.

Wishing to find out how the village servant was faring as the result of the war, I questioned a weaver, a shoemaker, a blacksmith and a barber. They stoutly denied all benefit from the high prices. The weaver summed up the situation in three words—'*Dang nahin milde*—We get no food'.



The shoemaker said that before the war for a pair of shoes he got two rupees, with which he could buy 40 seers of wheat. Now he gets six rupees, the price of only 24 seers. The blacksmith complained that he has now to pay fifty rupees for an acre of turnips for his buffalo instead of only nine or ten rupees. He makes not only ploughshares, but also hookahs, spades, chains, axes, knives and iron drinking vessels. 'And pistols?' asked the Inspector, remembering what we had heard elsewhere. '*Toba, toba*—fie, fie', was the reply. He used to make razors but has given it up. That brought us to the barber. He is one of nine (like the shoemaker) and between them they shave the whole village; no one shaves himself. And when he shaves a client, he cuts his nails. He sharpens his razor on a stone, but once a month takes it to the blacksmith for a more thorough doing. With his three sons he serves fifty families. Before the war it was only thirty. 'God's land has become large' was his explanation, and his way of saying the population was increasing. When asked whether he was not the better off for this, he said, 'God gave before—God still gives; before nothing remained, now too nothing remains.'

'Is this because your family has increased?'

'There has been no birth in our house since the war began.'

'A case of controls,' suggested some wag.

'Or *umr ka control*—the control of age,' suggested another—remarks followed by a ripple of laughter, with a final burst when someone said—'*zenani ka control*'—the control of the zenana.

If this was a covert reference to birth control, it certainly was not to modern methods, which appear to be unknown in the village except perhaps amongst the very few who have been to college. But it might have been a reference to indigenous methods—for example, to a mother nursing her children as long as possible—for the feeling is spreading that families should not be too large. The greatest blessing one can give a peasant is, 'May God give you milk and a son'. An Assistant Registrar said this one day to a man of about sixty and received the unexpected reply, 'I am tired of sons—they show no respect.'

Though the country we rode through had the flat monotony of the Punjab plain when neither river nor hill is in sight, our march was not without interest. Riding along the canal bank, while the day was still young, we spied a tiny raft of dry grass floating down the muddy stream in a halo of flame and smoke, which rose from a small earthenware saucer containing wick and oil. None of us, not even the zaildar, had ever seen such a thing before, but I had read of Hindus doing this on the Indus to attain some heart's desire, and that perhaps was the explanation. 'Hindu superstition,' said the Muslim Inspector in a superior voice. But it had its own beauty—and even significance, for what is life but a flame that flickers awhile on an ever-flowing stream, coming from the unknown and drifting towards it?

When it got too hot to go any pace, we fell into talk about marriage. Neither the Tehsildar nor the Inspector with me had seen their wives before marriage, though as men in the thirties both belong to the younger generation. Referring to the occasional clashes of opinion between young and old, the Inspector claimed to be on the side of the young—'Sir, I am modern man.' Yet he betrothed his daughter when only four months old to his brother's not much older son, and the betrothal, he said, would hold unless later on either party objected. A friend of his had done the same with his son, but the son had managed only to matriculate, whereas his betrothed got a degree. She was still willing to marry him, but he declined. Like many men, he did not relish the idea of a wife cleverer than himself. Three things, said the Inspector, are important in marriage—property, beauty, and education—in that order, he stressed. Morals were presumably taken for granted.

From marriage to purdah. The Inspector and Naib-Tehsildar, both Muslims from the northern Punjab, put up a spirited defence of the system. It was enjoined by the Koran, and without it there would be much evil doing. Women, said the Naib, must not be allowed to look upon men. He took the masculine view that if men err, it is woman's fault! The Inspector, more objective, said that

men in this country were not so civilized that it was safe for women to go about unveiled. Later on, I mentioned my surprise to a Muslim Assistant Registrar that every educated Muslim I had met on this tour was in favour of purdah, and to my astonishment, for he was highly educated, he was in favour of it too, not on religious grounds, but as a matter of family prestige. No doubt it was being rapidly given up by the educated who are rich enough to ignore public opinion, but amongst the middle class it was increasing. A Begum of Lahore who was a candidate in the last election, though dead against purdah, found it expedient to don a burqa when canvassing in the walled city of Lahore. Even those who are too poor to observe purdah are inclined to think that no woman out of purdah can be religious. In the village purdah is much less strict, and usually relatives, servants and tenants are allowed within the zenana, especially if husband and wife belong to the same village.

The Assistant Registrar, who comes from a very advanced village, said that a rapid change was coming over its women. Up to fifteen years ago they had little voice in anything that was being done; now they have as much say as the men. With a betrothal they have the last word, and when it comes to marriage, they dictate the terms of the dowry; in the old days, their concern was only with the clothes and jewellery. Before the canal came (in 1916), if they opposed their husbands, they were 'ruthlessly beaten'. Now this is unheard of. The village, as the A.R. himself emphasized, is not at all typical, but it shows the way the wind is blowing. Another pointer is the fact that when the war was not going well, the tenants, half in jest no doubt, used to twit their landlords, saying, 'Wait and see, the Russians will come and we shall then be equal with you'.

*December 19—Bakhwala to Pindi Bhattian—17 miles*

Today we had to cross the Chenab, the second of the Five Rivers; but first we had to get there, and that gave us a long cross-country ride through a poor and much-neglected tract where wells droned and men idled. The droning of the Persian wheel is much more marked than before the war.

Iron is difficult to get and the more melodious wood has to take its place. The earthenware pot is also back and is much pleasanter to look at than the iron bucket, but easily broken and less efficient, spilling one-third of the water it carries. Its merit to the cultivator is its cheapness, only five rupees a hundred against 300 for the bucket. And it has the further advantage that the village potter makes it, and whose handiwork is lovelier to watch than that of the potter ?<sup>1</sup>

We had not gone far before we were intercepted by a crowd of Janglis, who complained bitterly that a Hindu Khatri was exploiting them. I had great difficulty in making my way through them, one after the other holding on to my reins. A great drawback to an unofficial tour of this kind is that one is powerless to remedy grievances. All one can do is to listen patiently to each new tale, elaborately embroidered no doubt, but nearly always inspired by some tribulation or injustice. In this case, and also in Gurna, a village we visited later, a large area had been leased, before prices rose, to the Khatri for a few rupees an acre and was now being cultivated by the owners on his behalf on a fifty-fifty crop-sharing basis. The Khatri had certainly done the land a service by sinking a number of tube wells, but the figures he gave me left no doubt that, thanks to the rise in prices, he had got much the best of the bargain. At Gurna sheer necessity had forced the people to accept his terms, for in the last four years the Chenab, by a swing to the north, had reduced their wells from fifty to thirty. It doesn't do to live too near a Punjab river. It's good neither for the character nor for the land. Riverain people are generally a feckless lot, and these were no exception. No one had gone into the army, and no one had the capital to do what the Hindu had done. Yet, though they had had to bow the knee to his greater enterprise, they said, 'There is no question between Hindu and Muslim.'

When we got to the Chenab, we found that every arrangement had kindly been made to get our truck across by ferry ; but we were taking no risks and had sent it round

<sup>1</sup> For illustration see Plate VII, facing p. 210.

by the bridge at Chiniot, a fifty-mile detour. After being ferried across with our horses—a much easier business than with the Indus—we rode on under a hot sun enveloped in a cloud of dust blown along by a north wind. We were also on a metalled road, and it was many hours since we started. For once I sighed for a car.

Later in the afternoon, refreshed with food, drink and rest, I had a long talk with an Assistant Registrar. We were sitting outside the rest-house and the sun was setting in flame and splendour. I asked him whether that kind of thing gave the peasant any pleasure. None at all, he said, and if it did so to the educated, it was largely due to the influence of the West. The peasant did, however, get some enjoyment from moon and stars, and in the hot weather, when herding his cattle at night, he might be heard singing.

We went on talking and, feeling a little depressed by various things he had told me, I asked him what was the most hopeful feature in the Punjab today. 'That there has been no disturbance,' he replied.<sup>1</sup> Something indeed to be thankful for when one thinks of what has happened in the last four months in Calcutta, Eastern Bengal, Bihar, the U.P., and now in Hazara.<sup>2</sup>

## II—AN OLD CANAL COLONY

*December 20—Pindi Bhattian to Sangla—17 miles*

In crossing the Chenab we entered the central Punjab, where Muslim and Sikh are as intermingled as barley and wheat when sown together, where too the Muslim is for the most part a converted Hindu. There are many villages where Muslim and Sikh are of the same tribe, and both of Hindu ancestry, with still some customs in common. Riding along this morning, I asked a Muslim Inspector whether Muslims ever have their horoscopes cast. 'Never,' he said. Turning to another Muslim, a Bhatti Rajput—an important tribe of these parts—I said: 'Did *you* have your horoscope cast?' 'Yes,' he replied, and added, 'all

<sup>1</sup> This happy state of affairs came to an end in the following March.

<sup>2</sup> Serious disturbances broke out there shortly after we left the district.

Bhatti Rajputs have this done by the family Brahmin.' The Naib-Tehsildar, a Hindu, joining in, said: 'The zaildar and I are of the same tribe. He is a Bhatti, and I am a Bhatia; our origin is the same.' This he knew because his family tree is carefully kept by three Brahmins, one at Pindi Bhattian, another in Kashmir, and the third and most important at Hardwar in the United Provinces. The last inscribes each generation, as one follows another, in a book several feet long. When his father died three years ago, he threw his ashes into the Ganges at Hardwar, and had all his sons' names entered in the book.<sup>1</sup>

We stopped at two villages on our way, both badly waterlogged. I have already mentioned this blight,<sup>2</sup> and ever since we crossed the Jhelum there have been ominous signs of its spread. But today it was like leprosy infecting the whole countryside. For miles our horses' hoofs padded through the soggy snow-white earth. 'Like the snow in Italy' said a young man with us, who had served on the Western front. At each village there were loud lamentations, and at one inhabited by Janglis we were given a petition, part of which ran as follows:

We are the oldest dwellers of this land. We inhabited it long before the advent of the British Government in the Punjab. We lived here . . . when cultivation was scarce and living was hard. We passed through that phase of life into a prosperous, glorious period. . . . We are sad to inform you now that that period has long passed into privations, disease and death. . . . Vast stretches of fertile land have been turned into arid wastes which grow not even a blade of green grass to provide a morsel of fodder to the hungry cattle. The water level has come so higher up, that it has literally come under horse's hoof. It oozes by itself. . . . Our houses have crumbled to ground and the whole village . . . has been half turned into a big mound of dust. The dwellers have either left or died. The mosquito has made a permanent home with damp soil. Malaria which was a periodic epidemic of rainy season is a perennial disease of our village. The cattle have perished. The camels which was a big beast of burden have totally vanished from our houses. . . . Waterlogging has destroyed our land, our mainstay and the only source of income. We have turned paupers.

It needed no petition to bring home the disaster. The sight alone was enough to make one weep. It is sixteen

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> p. 66.

years since I rode here first<sup>1</sup> and five years later, finding things worse, I tried to bring home to Government the magnitude and cruelty of the disaster. Much has been done since, but large areas of rich colony land are now completely sterile. 'We can't even bury our dead' said someone at the first village, where the water is only  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet from the surface and the very houses are crumbling. Many miles of drains have been dug—the first we saw was near Mona—and today we rode along 'the main line'. Tube wells too are being sunk, and some see signs of improvement, which may, however, be due to two years of light rainfall. One of the two villages we saw had once won a prize of Rs. 1,000 for the way it was kept. It was tragic to see it encircled by the snowy foulness, broken only by patches of brown stagnant water. Yet the mud plaster of its houses had a whiteness and smoothness that mocked disaster.

Here at Sangla we are in country as much Sikh as Muslim, and one of the noblest-looking Sikhs I have ever seen came to see me. Though Maharaj Singh is 87, he is still Manager of a local High School and president of his village bank. He came, he said, for one thing only—to beg that the British might stay: 'We are but cattle; you understand government, we don't; whoever it is, Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, it is all the same: there is no honesty, no justice. If you go, we shall kill each other.' This and much more on the same theme, repeated again and again with a passion of entreaty, which left no doubt of his sincerity. A Belgian Father of the neighbourhood, who came to see us and who knows him well, says it is his theme wherever he goes. There was no answer I could give which would calm his disturbance of mind. And no wonder his mind is disturbed, for almost wherever I have been during the past year—and I have been over most of British India—I have found educated Indians expecting bloodshed, if not civil war. Curiously, a Muslim from the North, whom I knew and trusted as Commissioner and who now holds an important post, spoke in much the same vein as the Sikh when he came to see me this evening, and he is of a much younger generation.

<sup>1</sup> See *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 9.

No one would take Maharaj Singh for a day older than seventy : he carries himself as straight as a soldier, and with even more than a soldier’s alertness. He gave me a graphic account of his arrival here in ’92 when the Lyallpur colony was first started : the country all waste but dotted with jand trees,<sup>1</sup> snakes lifting angry heads, enormous scorpions, and not a bird to be seen. He was one of 140—‘ seventeen twenties ’, he said—all Sikhs, and when they saw the country, all but thirty-six ran away. And I can well believe it, for I was tempted to do the same when, on my first arrival from England’s ‘ green and pleasant land ’, I saw the abomination of desolation that much of the country still was, in ’04. They came on foot with their bullock carts from Wazirabad, the nearest station, seventy-five miles away, and the first thing they did was to sink wells for drinking water. The water was then ‘ ninety hands ’ (135 feet) down ;<sup>2</sup> now it is only ten feet, and with the last rise the fatal salts have appeared.

But, old though he is, the past did not interest him. It was the future that preyed on his mind, and entreating me once more to avert the impending change, he left. I was naturally moved by the earnestness of his wish for us to stay, but even more by his dark forebodings, which one felt unable to dispel. And they are not peculiar to him. A. asked the Belgian Father how this tract would react if, after our withdrawal, civil war clashes began in India. He shook his head gravely and said that in that case everything would explode, ‘ for there is seething unrest here ’ ; and he added that in the villages round the general comment on our coming withdrawal was, ‘ *Afsos ! Bara afsos !—* Alas ! Alas, alas ! ’

*December 21—Sangla to Uqbana—18 miles*

Today we were back in rich fertile country, and the farther we rode the richer it became, with more and more islets of embattled cane. But how long will the fertility last ? At a gathering of colonists from twelve villages at Salarwala there was deep concern at the appearance of the

<sup>1</sup> *Prosopis spicigera*.

<sup>2</sup> A ‘ hand ’ is from the elbow to the finger-tips, i.e. about 1½ feet.



dreaded salt. It is like a creeping paralysis, appearing fourteen years ago in one of the villages we saw yesterday, ten years ago round Sangla, and now ten miles farther west. In greater or less degree, all twelve villages are affected. Once the water table rises to within ten to twenty feet of the surface the salt appears, and as it rises a foot or more every year, the very existence of the colony is threatened. As we have seen, remedies are being tried but still with no certainty of success.

This is not the colonist's only source of anxiety. Fifty-four years old, the colony is now in its third generation, with the original one square<sup>1</sup> holdings so much smaller that many colonists now have less than half a square to live on. Fortunately the high prices have given them the means of buying land in Bikaner, Bahawalpur and Sind, all three of which have young colonies. One young man had bought three squares for Rs. 24,000 (£1,800) cash down. 'How have you managed to save so much?' I asked. 'We are four brothers—we wear homespun'; in other words, 'we are thrifty folk.'

It was a large gathering with seventy or eighty colonists sitting on the ground cheek by jowl, knee by knee. The Lyallpur colonist is the most modern-minded peasant in the Punjab. When the word *azadi*—freedom—was mentioned, there was no dissentient voice. All wanted it, and when I asked what they would do with it when they got it, a Sikh replied: 'Now we are slaves. When we are free, we shall serve ourselves and do as we like. Then we shall gladly pay more taxes.' The Sikh, who was very much to the Left, related how he had been to the Mayo Hospital in Lahore and found two nurses looking after only a few patients in the European ward and no more looking after forty in the Indian ward. He then asked me my pay and was a little taken aback when he heard that I had only a pension and had come out on my own. Another colonist, one of the more educated present, and wearing a fine black achkan,<sup>2</sup> said that when they were free they would have prosperity. 'What about the man who has just bought

<sup>1</sup> In this colony 27·8 acres.

<sup>2</sup> Close-fitting surcoat buttoning down the centre and reaching to the knee.

three squares for 24,000 rupees ? ' I asked to the general amusement.

The colony, thanks to its great prosperity, has far more amenities than the tract we have passed through to the north. Nine out of the twelve villages have primary or Lower Middle schools ; one has a High School ; two have dispensaries, and another a veterinary dispensary. Six receive a daily newspaper, and almost every village has a daily post ; but none has a wireless. A brawny loud-voiced peasant, who had tried to work up feeling with a story of general wretchedness, exclaimed : ' How can we who are so poor buy a wireless ? ' The answer was easy : just before the meeting the Assistant Registrar had told me a hundred co-operative societies had applied for sets.

Earlier in the day we visited a colony of Muslim Jats from Gurdaspur. Four of the original colonists were present, magnificent old men with snow-white beards, ' grey hairs and bruise of many days '. One was just on ninety and too old to say very much, but a comparatively young one of round about eighty was more communicative. Three hundred of them came on foot with their bullock carts from Lahore, ninety miles away. ' So many were we that people asked—where is the army going ? ' They arrived in May with the hot weather at its worst, and there was an outbreak of cholera. Eight or ten died ; there was panic, and twelve fled back to Gurdaspur. There was also great fear of the Janglis. ' *Baithan nabin dende*—they would not let us sit. Young Sahib<sup>1</sup> gave us an order—" Beat them ". They came at night ; we beat one or two, and stealing stopped.'

' We had no house, no shelter,' another chimed in.

' We made a tent of our *chaddar*,' and he lifted his cotton plaid over his aged head.

' Why did you come when you had so much to suffer ? '

' Through lack of land.'

Once more there is the same lack. The sons and grandsons are buying land in three Muslim areas—Bahawalpur, Rampur and Sind, not in Hindu Bikaner. ' If there were land in Mars we would go there,' exclaimed someone.

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Colonel Sir Popham Young, first Colonization Officer.

One of the pioneers said he had seven sons and eleven grandsons. 'They are ready to set out again and face the same troubles.'

'Have you ever regretted coming to the colony?' I asked. There was general laughter when he replied: 'I regret one thing only—I did not take more land. We could have had as much land as we wanted, but we could not manage more than one square.' He had, indeed, no other cause for regret. One of his sons is an Inspector in the Co-operative Department, a second the Manager of the local Co-operative Commission Shop, a third and a fourth are reading for a degree, and three more are farming the family square. Nevertheless he maintained that the old days were better. 'Now we are in prison': an allusion to the controls, and as he spoke, he took off his puggree to scratch his head and laid bare a forehead wrinkled like a well-ploughed field. Even when asked to forget the controls and compare '92 with '39, he said there was not much to choose between them. In the old days food was not adulterated, and the water of their home wells was better drinking than the semi-infected water of the canal; the land, too, has lost a third of its strength and requires more manure, but manure and waterlogging do not go well together. When he came here, the water level was ninety feet down, now it is only twelve feet and salts are appearing. But he admitted that now more milk is drunk—everyone has a buffalo—there is a variety of vegetables and not just the unappetizing turnip leaf, and for daily bread, rice and wheat are added to maize and millet. As to oranges and potatoes, the question then would have been—what are they? In those days, too, clothes were all of homespun; now he was wearing an up-to-date, though not very clean, woollen jersey. Finally, people have better furniture—the wicker armchair, for example—and many have pukka houses.<sup>1</sup>

The pukka house is a questionable gain, for it is nearly always ugly, whereas no house of its kind could have been more beautiful than his. Made almost entirely of mud bricks, it was faced with plaster as clean and smooth as

<sup>1</sup> Houses of burnt bricks.

polished stone, moulded, too, into lovely patterns by the ladies of the house wherever arch or pillar tempted loving hands. Inside, the rooms were adorned with every kind of vessel in earthenware or brass, all arranged with a scrupulous neatness learnt, one can hardly doubt, from the house-proud Jangli,<sup>1</sup> for I have never seen so well-appointed a house in Gurdaspur. But the whole way of life was different—larger, freer, more refined.

When we came to politics, a young man said: 'We all want freedom, but we don't want to exchange slavery to the English for slavery to the Hindu.' An older and more thoughtful man commented: 'We are bound to peace (*salaam di pabande*).<sup>1</sup> Peace, justice, and enough to eat are what the unlettered peasant wants from Government. Will they get them with freedom?

*December 22—Uqbana to Lyallpur—12 miles*

The twenty-eighth day since I rode out of Peshawar, and under a grey sky I rode into Lyallpur, my bourne for the moment, with 385 miles of riding behind me. A. and P. rode with me, P. now able to rise in his stirrups and even to bestride Goliath. I was on David, who takes some holding, and A. on Corydon. All three are now in good marching condition, though Corydon's ribs have still too much of a herring-bone look.

In today's village the colonists were Arains from Jullundur, the Punjab's most laborious peasants and by nature market gardeners. Once more we heard the tale of the first settling, and even at the risk of repetition it is worth recording, for soon there will be no one left to tell it. This time it came from a very deaf pioneer of 85. Sixty to seventy of them came with their carts from Jullundur, 180 miles in eight days, the old man said. 'Were the Janglis pleased to see you?' I asked, wishing to draw him out. The absurdity of the question made everyone laugh, and they laughed even louder at the old man's reply: 'They said to us—go away. They gave us much trouble: they let loose their cattle in our fields and stole ours. We

<sup>1</sup> For Jangli houses see *Rusticus*, p. 220, and *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 229.

beat those we caught (still louder laughter). There were big snakes—twenty from one bush; several of us were bitten and died.'

'Why, then, did you leave your village?'

'Our village was a piece of paradise; we left it because there was not enough land.'

And now once more there is not enough land. The old man has three sons and six grandsons and still only one square to support them, and for the whole village there is an average of little more than an acre a head.

The increase in population is serious throughout India, but particularly so in an old canal colony, where there is a definite standard of living to maintain. Two days ago I asked a very intelligent co-operator whether there was any knowledge in the village of birth control. '*Lafaz janta, lekin practice nabin*' was the hybrid reply—'The word is known, but there is no practice'. The more educated Muslims, too, think it contrary to religion. On the other hand, in the town, said the Naib-Tehsildar with us, practice is 'cent per cent'. Later on when I mentioned the subject to a middle-aged Sikh zaildar, who was riding with me, he quoted a pithy saying of Guru Govind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru—'*At grist nak*—too many children, hell'. And he added: 'Four things, the Guru said, a Sikh should do—live honestly, grow his own food, help his neighbour, and not too large a family.'

The colonists still fear the Janglis. The Forest Department are taking up small areas here and there—164 acres in this village—to grow trees for timber and fuel, presumably for the villagers' benefit. Here the villagers objected strongly, as the trees would give the Janglis cover for their depredations. It is not only the Janglis who are to be feared. Two years ago one of the old man's sons was murdered by a Sikh, who coveted his bicycle. As we rode out of the village, cries of '*Pakistan zindabad!* Long live Pakistan!' followed us out.

This is the most political atmosphere we have been in since we crossed the Indus, and one can well understand it

<sup>1</sup> *Guru* means spiritual teacher and was the title given to the first ten spiritual heads of the Sikhs. Guru Govind Singh's dates are 1675-1708.

with Sikh and Muslim geographically interlocked but sharply divided by the battle-cry of Pakistan. An old colleague I met today, a Muslim, thought this was having a demoralizing effect. Thousands of rupees had been spent on drink during the elections, and every sort of corruption practised. Astonishing figures are quoted for election expenses : a fight between uncle and nephew is said to have cost the family ten lakhs (£75,000). Thousands of rupees were spent in feeding and transporting supporters to and from the poll and in offerings to the Pirs taking part in the canvassing. In one contest the local Pir, with a fine impartiality, preached in favour of the League at one end of the constituency and for the Unionist Party at the other. Most of the figures quoted are doubtless exaggerated, but my old colleague said a friend had given him the following figures for his election :

- 1,000 gallons of petrol bought at controlled rates ;
- 1,000 gallons bought in the black market at Rs. 10 to 15  
a gallon ;
- 10 lorries engaged for a month at Rs. 100 a day ;
- 4 motor cars bought for canvassing.

In addition a house was built at the election centre, solely, it was said, for the election. These expenses came to Rs. 90,000, but there were others, forgotten by the friend, which brought the total up to a lakh.

The spenders of a lakh or more were doubtless the exception, but one day those riding with me put the average expenditure in their district, a prosperous one, at forty to sixty thousand rupees. North of the Jhelum it was put at fifteen to twenty thousand, and in the Frontier Province at ten to twelve thousand. When the struggle is sharp, the only limit is the purse. This explains the high figures in the rich tracts south of the Jhelum. All that can be said for them is that they help to distribute wealth, and, as Bacon said, wealth like muck is better spread.

The elections had one novel feature. For the first time the Muslim voted not for a person but a party. Many even gave the League candidate a rupee towards his expenses and walked some distance to record their vote. The

Punjab peasant is no longer indifferent to politics—how could he be with his future hanging in the balance?—but the election showed that for him religion is still the more powerful magnet of the two, more powerful even than feudalism, for many Muslim landlords standing against the League bit the dust. The cry was raised, 'Islam in danger', with in certain areas very crude variations, threatening those who opposed the League with hell and damnation and even with exclusion from burial in a Muslim cemetery. Few Muslims could resist the call of Islam, but it sometimes found the naïvest expression. A polling officer we met relates how a peasant who had come to vote asked him which of the two candidates was a Muslim. Hearing that this applied to both, he said, 'Then give my vote for whichever you please.' And the polling officer was not even a Muslim.

It was religion, too, as expounded by mullah and Pir which drew so many women to the polls, nearly all, of course, to vote as their husbands. But in one village north of the Jhelum they were active in pressing, almost forcing, their menfolk to vote for the League. Apart from an election, says an Assistant Registrar who knows the central Punjab well, village women do not show much interest in politics, but 'there is some curiosity'. Only a day or two ago his sixteen-year-old daughter-in-law, who has only had an elementary education, asked him, 'What is the news about Pakistan?' For the men, if Muslims, the chief spur is the fear of Hindu domination, deriving from the domination of the Hindu money-lender and trader, which began in the '70's and has taken a new lease of life with the control of supplies. The fear is widespread and the bloody doings in Bengal and Bihar have created, to quote the Assistant Registrar, 'some hatred in their hearts', 'but, as yet,' he added, 'it is only a feeling' and the relation between the different communities in the village is still a happy one.

### *December 23*

The whole morning was spent in talk with agricultural and Co-operative experts—Lyallpur is the agricultural capital of the Punjab—and I learnt much about the growing

of fruit and vegetables, for which the Punjab is admirably suited. After lunch, getting into the truck for the first time on this tour—A. and P. went on yesterday for Christmas shopping—I drove to Lahore, leaving the horses to follow by train to Gurdaspur, 150 miles to the north-east. This lengthens our way south, but it will give us a more varied and attractive route than if we were to march straight on. It was late afternoon when, across flat field and grove, we sighted the minarets and snow-white domes of Lahore's great mosque, rose-coloured in the sunset. So ends the first part of our trek.



## Chapter IV

### ACROSS THE BEAS TO THE SUTLEJ

#### I—THE BEAS AND ACROSS

##### *Christmas Eve*

Rejoined by A. and P., I continued in the truck another hundred miles, this time journeying north-east towards the Himalayas, and now we are in a fine old rest-house on the banks of the Upper Bari Doab canal, a canal fed by the Ravi, and thirty years older than the one just left.

In Lahore I was in an atmosphere of administration and politics, administration represented by the pile of files on my host's office table—how glad I was to be *functus officio*—and politics by our after-dinner talk. Discussion turned on the continued refusal of the League to take part in the Constituent Assembly now sitting at Delhi, a position difficult to reconcile with their taking part in the interim Government. Having allowed the Assembly to meet, we cannot very well reject the fruit of its labours; nor yet can we impose a constitution by force on Muslim India.<sup>1</sup> I suggested, therefore, that if the League persisted in its attitude, the least difficult alternative, though difficult enough, would be to accept whatever constitution the Assembly drew up, but for Hindustan<sup>2</sup> only, and to hand over accordingly, at the same time retiring into Muslim India until it, too, settled its future and drew up a constitution. On visiting a high authority this morning, I was interested to find his mind moving on the same lines and now convinced, though like myself most reluctantly, that there is no alternative to some form of Pakistan, the milder the better, of course.

##### *December 25 and 26—Christmas interlude*

Christmas Day was all one could wish, starting with some useful presents and ending, after a fifteen-mile walk to the

<sup>1</sup> i.e. the provinces in which Muslims predominated.

<sup>2</sup> The provinces in which Hindus predominated.

Beas and back, with the time-honoured fare and a vintage bottle of Veuve Cliquot. Today was even better. We went another twenty miles up the canal to its source at Mahdopur at the entrance to the hills, a grand drive with Devi coming ever nearer in snowy splendour and the Daulah Dhar's 15,000-foot wall of rock rising, as it seemed, straight from the plain. We found the perfect place for lunch, on a pile of deodar sleepers jutting out into the Ravi. After lunch a cold but glowing bath.

Thanks to our passage through Lahore, we now have lamps instead of lanterns to write up our diaries at the end of the day. A relief to have so little to write at the moment, but there is much planning and letter-writing to be done for what lies ahead.

*December 27—Bhimpur to Gurdaspur*

A day of preparation and talk—of preparation for the next stage of our trek, and of talk with our host and his friends at Gurdaspur. Thirty years ago, almost to the day, I arrived here on my first appointment to the Co-operative Societies Department. One of the two Inspectors who met me at the station was our host today, Sardar Bahadur, Sardar Beant Singh, who finally retired as Deputy Registrar of Co-operative Societies. For some years we worked together in the closest association, to my great advantage, as no one knows the peasant of the Central Punjab so well. Of his illuminating talk today I can necessarily say very little. But I must repeat one highly significant story he told of the hastily improvised Civil Supplies Department during the war. An acquaintance begged him to find a job for his son. With the help of another friend he managed to get him made a clerk in the department on sixty rupees a month. Meeting him by chance two years later, he was surprised to learn he had resigned. He was unable, he said, to live on a paltry sixty rupees a month. His father, whom he met later, had a very different explanation. The boy had made Rs. 1,20,000 (£9,000) in eighteen months and had thought it prudent to leave while the going was good.

The Sikh peasant may not smoke, but to make up he is a deep if irregular drinker, and he has no difficulty in

putting away a whole bottle of spirit at a sitting. And so, said the Sardar Sahib, wherever there is cane, there is a still. The unholy work is done either secretly in the cane, or openly on a canal bank—the safer place of the two, for if an Excise official suddenly appears, one kick and the whole plant disappears into the canal. The Sardar Sahib, who lives near a canal, has seen this done twice. The spirit is called the ‘*rori mark*’—the manure mark—because it is fermented in manure (*rori*). In village life manure seems to be used for almost anything rather than its proper purpose—to simmer the milk, plaster the walls, clean the floors, and to keep the hookah alight.

When asked what changes for the better he had seen in village life during the last ten years, the Sardar Sahib said—an increase in self-respect. There is also more education, and people are better off. But women who belong to the educated class work less hard than they did, and they all want servants. That is perhaps a Punjab failing. I remember a lady from Gujarat (near Bombay) telling me before the war how rare it was for the wives of Punjab officials drawing as little as two or three hundred rupees a month to do their own cooking. Very different, she said, from her part of India. I was surprised to hear from the Sardar that servants were hard to come by and are beginning to want fixed hours of work and even a regular day off. I have never come across this with my own servants or heard of it elsewhere, but the point is worth noting as perhaps a first indication of a change with which we are only too familiar in the West.

The Sardar Sahib had much to say about the political situation, naturally from the Sikh point of view, since he is a Sikh; and it was interesting, not to say refreshing, to hear this point of view for a change. The Sikhs, he said, feel their daily life threatened by Pakistan, on two special points—language and *jhatka*. The League is all for Urdu in the schools, though Punjabi is the language of the Punjab home, and Urdu is a difficult language, taking, he said, five years to learn and only five months to forget, whereas Punjabi can be learnt in six months. He admitted the obvious difficulty that Punjabi varies from one part

of the province to another, but he did not think it insuperable, as Punjabi has a good literature.

As to *jhatka*, Sikhs will only eat the meat of cattle slaughtered by a single blow of the axe, whereas Muslims, following Moses, insist upon *halal*, that is, on the throat being cut so that blood flows before death.<sup>1</sup> Many are the points that divide one Indian from another, and this is a very real one, leading sometimes to riot and murder. Only recently the wife of a highly placed Muslim official told me that it was a difficulty in entertaining an almost equally well-placed Sikh couple. When she dined with them, she did not bother to ask how the meat had originated, but she noticed that when it was the other way round, the Sikh wife ate no meat; so she began doing the same in their house. This led to explanations and to each eating the other's meat.

*December 28—Gurdaspur to Mukerian—20 miles*

Alexander's army refused to cross the Beas and he had to turn and go home. If it was on a day like this, I can well understand it. Yet he hadn't our difficulty to contend with—a 30 cwt. truck to get across! Could we manage it, or should we send it 130 miles round by Amritsar and Jullundur—the only alternative? That was the question, and with a limited allowance of petrol, an important one. The District Engineers on both sides of the river said the crossing by ferry was feasible—provided it did not rain. Yesterday there was heavy cloud over the hills, but this morning they were tolerably clear, and towards the Beas the sky was blue. We decided to risk it.

It was 9.30 before breakfast was finished, and then we had to go to the Sardar's village, three miles to one side of our route, to pick up the horses and their kit, and when we got there the Sardar Sahib naturally wanted to show us the palatial family mansion. When at last we got away it was 10.30 and there was a stretch of cloud behind us to the north which, however, seemed to be drifting away towards Amritsar and Lahore. But I had not reckoned

<sup>1</sup> 'Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh.'—*Deuteronomy*, xii. 23.

with the north wind, and long before I reached the ferry, ten miles away, the cloud had spread across the sky in 'ugly rack'. The attack opened with a good drenching shower and a series of thunderclaps; but when I reached the ferry it had stopped, and there, to my relief, was the truck already across with A. and P. in charge, having cleared two miles of sandy or slippery going along the river bank, sometimes on its very edge. But it was still in the ferry boat, and it was not an easy matter to get it out. In time this, too, was accomplished, and amid congratulations and thanks to those concerned, I set out to ride the six miles the other side. I had hardly started when the rain began again, and this time it did not stop. I turned back to see how this would affect the truck. The first job was to get it up the steep, and now slippery, river bank. The next obstacle, a few hundred yards farther on, was a slough of mud and water, and there the truck stuck. Do what we could, with a dozen wet shivering yokels to help us, we could not get it out and it was decided that I should ride on and send out tongas from Mukerian. Down, down came the rain without a moment's respite, with incessant thunder and lightning, the lightning once or twice so close that it was not blue but pink. The horses minded the rain and cold much more than the noise and flashes—one, indeed, while waiting for me under a tree, wanted to lie down—and they were in a piteous state when at last we splashed through mud and water into the compound here. Tongas had now to be found, and it was past four before the only three to be had could be dispatched. Not till seven o'clock did A. and P. appear, soaked to the skin and with what a sad but gallant tale of hard, persistent, fruitless endeavour. They got the truck out of the slough where I left them only to find that the road, which is nothing but a cart track, had almost disappeared into mud and water. They stuck again and again, but each time they contrived a way out, until at last they came to where the track became sheer river. They made a dash for it, and with barely six feet left once more they stuck. For two hours they laboured at engine and wheel, but by this time the driver's morale had gone and the peasants who gathered round

were too sodden with the rain to do more than pretend to push. So there it had to be left for the night. In six hours it had done three miles !

*December 29—Mukerian—Halt*

Two and a half inches of rain here yesterday, says the rain gauge ; but now there is dazzling sunshine, with Devi and the Daulah Dhar at their loveliest, deep in snow from head to foot. Morale is restored all round after a night of profound slumber, and the driver, who last night begged that his family in Lahore might be wired for, was all energy and smiles cleaning the truck, which was pulled out of its watery grave by two phlegmatic buffaloes. The road on was declared impassable, so the day was spent in drying our very miscellaneous kit in the verandah, and blankets, saddles and grain out in the compound—no longer a lake. A.'s jodhpurs were hung in front of the sitting-room fire and in the loveliness of the day so entirely forgotten that half a leg was burnt away before they were remembered ! No other casualties, except the disappearance of a hardly touched Christmas cake, explained perhaps by the cook's smile this morning—' the smile on the face of the tiger '.

*December 30—Mukerian to Hariana—25 miles*

For the first time we are a day behind schedule and, the road to Tanda being still impassable, we had to switch to Hariana. It was another perfect day, with only one drawback—the hills were veiled in the thick mist of a drying earth. But the earth itself could not have been lovelier—young wheat, ripening cane and dark mango grove all showing man's cunning hand in complete harmony with nature's, and not, as so often in India, struggling half-heartedly against her callous caprices.

One of the first persons we met on the road looked so dignified and learned that I instinctively addressed him as ' Maulvi Sahib '.\* He was not a man of ordinary learning, but he had the learning that India requires more than any other—the learning that heals. He was a hakeem, who had spent four years at the Yunani College in Delhi for his

\* Technically one learned in the Muslim scriptures.

diploma and now practised in and around Mukerian, using, like the hakeem at Talagang,<sup>1</sup> both pearl and gold in his art. He had the dignity of those brought up on traditional lines, very different from a group of rather plump educated urbans waiting for a bus, who answered some remark I made to them in passing with the stiff politeness of the sophisticated. Near Dasuya, the headquarters of the tehsil through which we were riding, we were stopped by a number of villagers who complained that they were short of grain to eat, and could not buy it anywhere. No village was allowed to sell to another, and the shopkeepers of Dasuya were not allowed to sell to anyone. Inquiry in Dasuya revealed the surprising fact that for a whole month sale there had been forbidden and had only been reopened during the last two or three days. 'It's an order from Lahore' was the only explanation. The poor, said the Tehsildar, either begged or bought grain secretly from the bigger farmers. Lahore should be in far closer touch with the countryside if its very elaborate plans are to work.

One of the difficulties of this tour is the commissariat. A number of commodities, varying from province to province, are rationed, and others, varying from district to district, are in short supply. Servants and horses have to be fed as well as ourselves, but the emergency ration card for those on the move is unknown. Nomads are therefore dependent on the help and goodwill of those to be met on the way. This we have had in full measure, and the last instance was at Mukerian, where the Naib-Tehsildar kindly let us have six pounds of its first-rate rice from his own store, since there was none to be had in the bazaar. There was the usual difficulty in persuading him to accept payment, and when I happened to mention this to the Tehsildar in his presence—we wanted some further supplies—he rounded on him in the best oriental style, 'What! accept payment from a guest?' The poor Naib would have been utterly confounded had I not hurriedly explained that he had yielded only to compulsion.

After lunch in the sunshine at Dasuya we set out for Haryana. I had with me a succession of Sikh zaildars—we

<sup>1</sup> See p. 48.

are now in Sikh country—and an attractive young Sikh official from a village in the Ludhiana district. ‘Is poison still a fear in the village?’ I asked him, remembering the tales I used to hear in days gone by. ‘Yes,’ he said, smiling downwards into his not very full beard. ‘When there is enmity, there is fear and we do not eat together, or if we do, we eat with one of them’—meaning they shared the same food. Ground glass is the favourite means, but the bones of a corpse also have their use! After this I was not surprised to hear that the evil eye is another source of dread. In his village there are ‘five-ten’ who are feared on this account. Later the wife of an Indian member of the I.C.S. admitted to us that she was afraid of it, and her husband said that people sometimes make a black mark on a child’s face to avert it and, as his wife added, even changed its clothes if it was caught by a doubtful glance.

I rarely ride when my horse walks, but lead it instead. I was doing this when I fell in with two young Sikhs, one of them with Joad’s latest book in his hand. I asked them who was their leader in politics. No one, they said. ‘Not Tara Singh?’ ‘No, he is not an agriculturist.’ Actually, he is a Khatri from Rawalpindi and at the moment they perhaps forgot that their ten Gurus, beginning with the saintly Guru Nanak, were all Khatri.<sup>1</sup> ‘How about —?’ I continued, and I named another well-known Sikh. ‘A great rogue.’ ‘And Colonel —?’ ‘Another rogue.’ ‘And Swaran Singh (the Minister for Development)?’ ‘He has yet to prove himself.’ The answers were characteristic of a community which holds together closely, but whose members, like the Scotch, bow the knee only to themselves and God. Politically, they would be in a much stronger position if only they would close their ranks and follow a single leader. Their position is the most difficult of any community in India, and they might do worse than adopt as their motto the old Punjab saying—*akath lobe di lath*—unity, a rod of iron. This, however, by the way. The two young Sikhs were now asking me why I had come to India, and when I explained, one inquired, ‘Where did you sleep last night?’ Hearing it was Mukerian, he said,

<sup>1</sup> A caste prominent in administration and commerce.



‘Why not in a village?’ A pertinent question put in a slightly impertinent tone. All I could say was that there was a limit to what can be done at sixty-six, and I was no fakir. Nor, indeed, would a village be particularly pleased to see us descend upon it with servants and horses. Both were critical of the British. They mentioned ‘the black road’ out of Burma, and one said the fall of Singapore was ‘the turning-point in Indian history’—it had roused so much feeling against us. There was even less I could say about that.

The road from Dasuya took us through one of the richest bits of the Punjab, a veritable garden of mango, cane and wheat, all radiant after the rain. But there is a serpent in the garden: some pest is attacking the mango trees. As we rode into Haryana, the setting sun turned their close-set trunks into ‘fiery grates of hell’.

*New Year's Eve—Haryana to Hoshiarpur—10 miles*

Off early this morning into a dewy and misty world, which the sun slowly turned into a paradise of green and gold, seen where mangoes grew through dark aisles of black trunks. About five miles from Hoshiarpur, our attention was attracted by a pleasant-looking white house standing at a little distance from the road with young wheat round it and an orchard garden in front. It proved to be one of the many co-operative medical dispensaries which have sprung up since '38. Actually, Sardar Beant Singh and I started one in the Gurdaspur district<sup>1</sup> in 1918, two or three years before the first was started in Jugoslavia, the home of this type of Co-operation. But, alas, that dispensary, like many other pioneer efforts, did not long survive as a Co-operative society.

On entering Hoshiarpur, the headquarters of the district, the uncleanly aroma of Indian city life filled our country nostrils, and noise and shoddiness surrounded us, redeemed only by a townsman's mocking voice calling out, as we came ‘sounding through the town’, ‘Is this the cavalry coming?’ More than ever did it seem better to live in the village. But an educated Pathan, whom I met later in the day,

<sup>1</sup> At Bham.

when the Deputy Commissioner drove us out to see the Siwaliks, thought very differently. He has been living in his village 'ever since he left college, and he is now 53. As a young man he refused the post of Tehsildar that he might look after his 400-acre estate. Bitterly he regrets this. What is life in the village, he said, but a life without society, a life of constant quarrels amongst neighbours devoured by jealousy at the sight of anyone doing better than themselves, and with 'no reasonableness' about anything? On one occasion he planted 10,000 shisham trees<sup>1</sup> as part of a reclamation scheme, only to be told one morning that they had been uprooted. Finding some tracks in the sandy soil, he covered them with earthenware and sent for a tracker he knew in Montgomery, where the prevalence of cattle-theft produces its own antidotes. The tracker came and the whole village was paraded before him. The culprit was spotted and confessed that he had thrown many of the seedlings down a well, where they were duly found. What made the deed peculiarly black was that he was one of the Pathan's tenants and his family had been on the estate for over a generation. He did it out of spite, said the Pathan; but what provoked the spite he didn't say. The story recalled the man in the Bible who sowed his neighbour's wheat with tares. Both episodes, alas, are characteristic of one side of village life.

The Pathan's work takes him regularly to Hoshiarpur. When I asked him whether it was not a relief to return in the evening to the peace and beauty of the country, he replied drily: 'When I come back from my work and go out in the evening, I find that someone has stolen my crop or lopped my trees. There is always some trouble.' His mind was deeply embittered, and the bitterness was not the less for seeing younger men in high posts, one of which he might well be holding himself had he accepted the tehsildarship. Yet there before us, in the shape of orchard, tree and crop, were the fruits of his labours, more enduring, and certainly more apparent, than what most officials can look back upon, however long and arduous their service.

<sup>1</sup> *Dalbergia sissoo*.

## II—HINDU, MUSLIM AND SIKH

*New Year's Day, 1947—Hoshiarpur to Mahilpur—14 miles*

No time for any New Year resolutions : last night I was up till 11.30 trying to bring this record up to date—rarely done before eleven—and up at six this morning in the same endeavour.

We were off at 7.30 and, with one exception, all the zaildars who rode with us were once more Sikhs, for we are still in a miniature Sikhistan. The exception was a Pathan, not pleasant to look at, with a fat bad-tempered face, but my heart warmed to him when, unlike yesterday's Pathan, he said he preferred the village to the town. 'Air and water (his way of describing the climate) are better there, and there is more good feeling, and if a man is in trouble, all will help him. Food, too, is purer.' The Sikh zaildars who rode with me all agreed, independently of each other, in regarding Master Tara Singh as their leader, and this seems the more general view amongst Sikhs not markedly to the Left.

In the afternoon I renewed an experience of eighteen years ago and met the Directors of the Mahilpur Co-operative Banking Union. One small change I noticed at once. Eighteen years ago, of the thirty people present only ten wore coats of European style.<sup>1</sup> Today, with perhaps one exception, all were wearing them. Almost all were Sikhs, with beards, black or grey, long and flowing, curled and thick. It was a lively meeting, as meetings nearly always are when Sikhs are present, for they have plenty to say and are not afraid to say it. All seemed anxious to be 'free'. 'We are in bonds,' said one. 'When we are free, we can do what we like.' Yet after the meeting a wise old bird, of some standing in Mahilpur, said to me privately : 'You should keep a hand on our heads, as a father does with a child who cannot yet look after himself.' 'Is that merely *your* opinion ?' I asked. 'No, many think like that.'

Village education has gone further in Hoshiarpur than in any other district in the Punjab. There are over thirty

<sup>1</sup> See *Rusticus*, p. 29.

High Schools, and here at Mahilpur, a place of only 4,000 inhabitants, there is even a degree college, the first to be opened in what is nothing but a large village. The gathering was justly proud of it. Over twenty acres have been given free—land here is worth four to five thousand rupees an acre (£300 to £375)—and  $3\frac{1}{2}$  lakhs (£26,250), including nearly a lakh from Sikhs in England and America, have been subscribed for its endowment. With so many schools in the district, I wondered what had been the effect of education on village life. The answer was: 'Look at Mahilpur. Before the war there were twenty-two young men with a B.A. degree, and all unemployed. The war came, and all got employment. Now five are Majors, eight are Captains and one is a Lieutenant. Could this have happened, had they not been educated?' The cynic might have observed that apparently education paid not in peace but in war.

The Sikhs have always been to the fore in schools for girls, and those present today said they should have the same facilities as boys. Were not five actually reading with the 150 young men in the College? 'But why only five?' I asked. 'Because there is a High School for the boys but only a Middle School for the girls.' 'Then should you not have started a High School for the girls before starting a College for the boys?' This sent a laugh round the younger men at the back, but the rest were too old to appreciate so modern an argument.

Eighteen years ago it would have been a little hazardous to mention birth-control at a meeting of this kind; but when today I suggested it as the only possible remedy for a situation which threatens to undermine their standard of living, the subject was evidently familiar; so much so that, when I asked what they would do when 'free' which they could not do now, one of them said: 'We will raise the question of birth-control.' A pertinent answer, for the question is essentially one that a foreign government funks, as I have found more than once when pressing for its study in relation to the village. With the Sikhs this should not be difficult, as no religious issue is involved. With Muslims the matter is more doubtful. We have met two lately who

differed on the point. The younger said it was not opposed to Islam; the older, that it was. 'How then,' I asked the older, 'would you keep the great increase in population in check?' 'God knows how to weed them out,' he replied. 'Are there not plague and war?'

I was about to wind up the meeting when someone asked me what I thought about the League. The question brought the whole complex political situation boiling up in a splutter of talk. But nothing of any substance emerged, only accusation and prejudice, of which we have already had too much, whatever the party.

What is needed is more of the human touch, and I had it this morning in its most winning form. As we were walking round a Sikh village, I felt a soft little hand steal into mine. Looking down, I saw a Sikh boy of five at my side, and we continued hand in hand until I left the village. It is, I fear, a reflection upon one's manner and appearance that this had never happened to me in an Indian village before. And there is India herself who has never been willing to put her hand in ours. Perhaps the day will come when she will do so, when, as in my case, England is *functus officio*!

It was not the only sign of gentleness in the village. As we were talking, a bullock rested his noble head on the shoulder of a peasant standing by. The village was full of fine bullocks with a splendour of hump, horn and dewlap which made them as pleasant to look at as the English cart-horse at his best, and daily we see them on the road.

*January 2, 1947—Mahilpur to Garshankar—11 miles*

In this tract, the country between the Beas and the Sutlej, tribes and religions are inextricably intermingled. Today the first zaildar to ride with me was a Sikh Jat, the second a Hindu Jat, the third a Hindu Rajput, and the fourth a Muslim Rajput. And how much Hindu and Muslim have in common is shown by the fact that the Rajputs of both communities observe purdah. How to fit Pakistan into these conditions? A leading Hindu Rajput, a soldier with a fine record, who came to see me in Hoshiarpur, said that the Rajputs of Una,<sup>1</sup> his home, would never

<sup>1</sup> A tehsil of Hoshiarpur between the Siwaliks and the Himalayas.

tolerate being included in it. ‘ We shall fight if it comes.’ Today’s Muslim Rajput, a civilian, also thought Pakistan impossible, and with a civilian’s more pacific temper and with greater wisdom, said the remedy was not to fight but to restore the strength of the Unionist Party, which was smashed by the League at the last election.

The word *azadi*—freedom—is on everyone’s lips, but, said one of the Hindu zaildars, a retired soldier who had served in both Persia and Russia : ‘ Not for a hundred years will people be able to run their own affairs.’ ‘ What will you do when you are free which you have not been able to do yet ? ’ is a question I have often put at meetings, and I put it again today at perhaps the biggest meeting I have yet attended. Once a month the eighteen zaildars and fourteen sufedposhes<sup>1</sup> of the tehsil meet to hear the orders of Government and discuss questions of local importance. This was the occasion of the meeting, but as it was held in the crowded tehsil compound, many others gathered round and interjected opinion and comment. We discussed many things, and on some points tongues wagged freely ; but when I put this question, there was complete silence, with here and there white teeth showing in surreptitious laughter, for just before someone had said, ‘ We are restless for freedom.’ At last an answer came from a clerk with a babu face : ‘ We will have more industries, we will not let our raw material go to other countries, we will manage things as we like, we will raise the standard of living.’ That was the nearest I could get to a concrete suggestion, and I have rarely got nearer anywhere else.

In this tehsil there are seven High Schools for boys, but for girls nothing better than a Middle School. When this was pointed out, the value of higher education for girls was disputed. It was agreed that primary education should be compulsory for both girls and boys, but many doubted whether it should go much further for girls. A burly black-bearded Sikh in the crowd set us all laughing by saying : ‘ You give your land to the boys and none to the girls : how should you not spend more on the boys ? ’

<sup>1</sup> A rural notable of the yeoman type, intermediate in status between zaildar and village headman.

A case of 'to them that have'. But a zaildar made the unexpected comment: 'If the land is to go to the eldest son (we had discussed this possibility to prevent its further subdivision), the younger sons will not find wives, as uneducated girls want to marry land; so let the girls be educated.'

As at Mahilpur, I asked what had been the effect of education on village life. At first they were puzzled, but after a pause two or three ventured on a reply. One said, education is good only for service; another, only to make clerks, adding 'there is no technical teaching.' But a third, more observant, said: 'Agriculture has improved, and Co-operation has gained.' He was right. With 3,000 societies Co-operation is now a vital element in the life of the District; and as to agriculture, eighteen years ago I noted how poor was the quality of the sugar-cane,<sup>1</sup> but today it was the best we have seen since Mardan.

In one respect there is no improvement: the water-table continues to fall. It affects the whole tehsil and spells disaster in a tract whose fine cultivation depends on wells. One greybeard said that, when he was twelve years old, the water in his village was only 13½ feet down, and now, forty-two years later, it is sixty feet down—just the opposite of what has happened in the Lyallpur colony,<sup>2</sup> and almost as serious. So far the problem has defied the expert.

There is yet another handicap. Before the war the peasant, pressing ever more thickly on the ground, emigrated by the thousand; but now new visas are not to be had, and population grows and grows. The only remedy the meeting could suggest was factories. There is not a single one in the tehsil. 'Government has not made them for us' was the time-honoured excuse. How great the pressure is on the soil was shown by a small Sikh village we saw in the morning, where the 142 owners had only 315 acres between them.

One change I regret in this beautiful fertile district, and it is due to the West at its worst—the walls of the houses

<sup>1</sup> See *Rusticus*, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 79.

along the highway are plastered with advertisements—not, however, without a touch of humour, as for example a preparation from flowers styled (in Arabic character) ‘Refreshive Scent’.

*January 3—Garshankar to Balachaur—16 miles*

Yesterday Sikhistan; today the threshold of Hindustan. The Sikh was still in evidence, but Hindu Rajput and Jat were predominant, with temples instead of mosques, peacocks strutting along the housetops, and peahens pecking sedately in the fields, and for the first time I was given the ‘*namaste*’ greeting<sup>1</sup> instead of the Muslim salaam. The first person, too, with anything definite to say was a Brahmin. I had not expected to stop at his village (Dhamai), but when I got off my horse, to have a word with the line of people waiting to greet me, I found too much to hear and see to pass it by.

It was an ordinary village to look at, full of the solid brick houses so common in this district, and with lanes so narrow that even for the pedestrian it was almost a case of one-way traffic. But they had been paved at a cost of about Rs. 600, and in the same spirit of self-help the village had started a girls’ school. They could, however, only afford to give the two mistresses twenty-five rupees a month in one case and fifteen in the other, and to place a disused one-room house at their disposal for their seventy pupils.

Wishing to find out what part religious observance played in the daily life of so sensible a people, I asked the Hindus whether they had been to their temple this morning. All said no, including the Brahmin schoolmaster, who said he had had to look after his school. ‘Which is best, school or temple?’ I asked. ‘For these days the school,’ he replied amidst laughter. There was another laugh when, after the Sikhs had admitted not having been to the Gurdwara, the one Muslim present claimed to have said his prayers. Hindu and Sikh only visit temple or Gurdwara on special days like Sangrant, the first of the month, and Puranmashi, the day of the full moon. Curiously, for the

<sup>1</sup> A Hindu greeting to the elderly meaning ‘at your service’.



Sikh another occasion is Sunday. 'It comes from those who served in the war,' they explained. The temple has no formal priest, but a Sanyasi,<sup>1</sup> who came there twenty-five years ago from no one knew where. He tinkles the bell and offers the *dhup*, a mixture of ghi, raisins, almonds and musk. Some of it was produced and set alight, and we inhaled its delicate smoke and scent. Yesterday's village also had no priest but only a sadhu<sup>2</sup> who, the villagers said with a laugh, ate all their offerings.

The Brahmin was eloquent on the change in the times. Brahmins now could only expect special respect if they discharged their Brahminical duties, and many of them didn't. He himself does, but even so it is only the few who touch his feet. In Balachaur, the many Brahmin families are mostly shopkeepers. Brahmins, however, still come first in village society, where everyone, as in the West till modern times, has his degree or place. The Rajputs, who own the land, come next, with the chairman of the panchayat as first amongst equals. Then come the shopkeepers, and below them the village servants, and at the base of the tiny pyramid tanner and sweeper, the sweeper a degree lower than the tanner. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh live together, we were told, in perfect amity. The paving of the lanes, the starting of the girls' school with girls of each community, the panchayat, and the consolidation of holdings—this too has been done—were all evidence of this. When we left, A. rightly remarked, to the evident pleasure of those around, that if the whole of India were like them, it could have its freedom at once.

There has been much talk of freedom today. All say they want it, but to few is it more than the latest shibboleth, and for these few it has not always the same meaning. One zaildar, a Hindu Jat, said there had been less and less tranquillity since the idea of freedom got abroad. Was he thinking of recent events? No, he said it began with the Babbar Akali movement of 1923, when both his father and uncle were murdered for helping Government. Now, though there is unity on the surface—he was referring to

<sup>1</sup> A Hindu who has renounced the world.

<sup>2</sup> A Hindu ascetic, not always genuine.

this tract—in people’s hearts, there is tension.’ A little later we were joined by a young Sikh Jat of 24, a war Captain on leave. He, too, wanted freedom, but had no illusions about the future and said there would certainly be civil war. ‘What part will the army play then?’ I asked. Those who joined before the war, he said, whether officers or men, would obey the orders of Government, whatever they were, but the rest had not the old tradition behind them. Then he added reflectively: ‘After all, people are free now: they can go where they like, trade as they like, cultivate as they like, marry as they like.’ Another zaildar, who also desired freedom, said ‘the background is very weak.’ But the man I felt most in sympathy with was a little middle-aged peasant with a scrubby red beard who waited on me with a deputation of local notabilities at Balachaur. Speaking with great earnestness, he said they all wanted freedom, yet they did not want us to go: on the contrary, they were most anxious for us to stay and help them, but as ‘brothers and equals’. That seemed to me wisdom itself, for in the future which of us can do without the other?

The deputation, which consisted of a dozen or more, had a number of embarrassing requests, embarrassing because, as I told them, I now had no authority of any kind. This simple statement of fact they brushed aside as absurd, and went on from request to request. The one that embarrassed me most, because of its strong claim for help, was that land should be given to the peasants of a village, whose land had mostly been swept away by the Sutlej. One of the victims was present, and he stuck to me like a leech even when the others withdrew, every muscle of his face pleading for help. It was the same with those whom we met near the Chenab.<sup>2</sup> The Punjab rivers have long arms, and those who live within their reach must be prepared to see their land disappear in the swirl of some uncontrollable flood.

<sup>1</sup> In the following July the District was declared a ‘dangerously disturbed area’ and a month later it was heavily involved in the massacres which followed the delimitation of the boundary between Eastern and Western Punjab.

<sup>2</sup> p. 75.

The deputation gone, I had settled down to my diary when a peasant from a village (Samundra) we passed through in the morning was announced. Eighteen years ago I inspected its Co-operative society, and this morning I stopped to inquire after the president and his family. A son appeared, but the father was out in the fields, so I rode on, leaving a message of greeting to be given him. And here he was, an ordinary ten-acre peasant proprietor, old and grey-haired. On hearing the message, he had jumped into the first bus that passed and pursued me the ten miles here. He had no request to make of any kind, but merely wished to see me again. Who would not love people who do this? And it might happen anywhere in India.

At Gurdaspur I was surprised to hear that since the war it was difficult to get servants. I heard this again this afternoon when I met a number of Rajputs. They said that out of their forty to fifty families, only six or seven still had them. Many of their old servants had enlisted and now turned up their noses at domestic service. The Sikh Captain had said much the same thing in the morning. 'They no longer bend the neck like the old, nor do they touch the knee,' and he was glad they didn't. For the purdah-loving Rajput a servant is almost a necessity to look after his zenana. When I suggested to the Rajputs that purdah must be a handicap in their work, since their womenfolk could not bring them their midday meal in the fields, they said, on the contrary it encouraged good fellowship, brother helping brother by bringing out the meal instead.

From domestic servants we passed to village servants, and, since we are now on the edge of Hindu India, that led to untouchability. Yesterday I was told that it had lost its sting. Here the older villagers, whether Hindu or Sikh, still sprinkle themselves with water if either sweeper or tanner happen to touch them, but the younger have given it up. 'We saw you shaking hands with them,' said a zaildar; 'we did the same, and now in my village one has become M.L.A.' At Balachaur 50 per cent of the old

<sup>1</sup> Member of the (Provincial) Legislative Assembly.

disabilities have gone, but untouchables are still not allowed to enter the temple or drink water from a Rajput well; nor may they sit on the same bedstead. The untouchable's attitude to the Rajputs was put by a N.C.O. tanner back from the army. 'We don't like to mix with them,' he said, meaning they were uncertain of the treatment they would get if they tried. They have their own well and are now building a temple of their own. It is typical of India's ingrained feeling for caste that they won't allow the sweeper to use the well; so he, too, must have a well of his own. When this came out in answer to a question, the Rajputs laughed delightedly at the tiny hit.

Like the soldier we met at Dhok Pathan,<sup>1</sup> the N.C.O. wanted cleanliness of person, house, food, and clothes. 'But how', he asked, 'is this possible when we are so many in so little space and the Rajput owners will not give us more room?' On my way back I went to see his house, and it was certainly a tight fit—only two small rooms, a dark inner room opening into an outer, and the outer begrimed with smoke from the fireplace in the corner. 'Why not (I suggested) have the fireplace in the courtyard outside, as people do in the north?' This was a new idea to him, and yet how easy to make a little covered niche for the purpose, and what a difference it makes to a house without a chimney!

We have seen many houses on this tour, all chosen at random and nearly all a pleasure to look at. Today's were not quite so clean, though possessions, which included torches, were all in orderly array. On the other hand, well-rounded arches are now making their appearance. Is this due to the spread of Moghul influence northwards from Agra and Delhi? Or is it the first sign of the somewhat crude virility of the Punjab giving way to the more delicate influences of Hindustan? Paintings are appearing on the walls, and on the wall of a Sikh house we found the saintly Guru Nanak sitting in state between two Hindu deities—a symbol of the religious affinity between Hindu and Sikh, so close that families often include both.

We have a new driver. The man engaged at Lahore was too big for his seat. He was ashamed of being seen in a

<sup>1</sup> p. 43.

truck after driving Financial Commissioners about in their cars, and, after all, who is this Sahib who has no office at all ? Also, with less to do than anyone else, he refused to help the other servants in their work—a mixture of dignity and impudence. At Dhok Pathan he wanted to go, but when told he could go if he liked, he said he would stay. Then came the crossing of the Beas. This was too much for him, and now a very different type sits in his place, a simple Rajput peasant, whom the war drew from his village to drive trucks in Syria and Iraq.

*January 4—Balachaur to Chamkaur, via Rupar—28 miles*

It was touch and go today whether the truck would get across the Sutlej. It had rained a little yesterday, and when we got up the sky was overcast and there was an occasional spit of rain. This went on most of the morning, adding to our anxiety. The road was mainly sand, a point in our favour, as rain makes it firm ; but there were ugly patches of clay and mud, and a long stretch of heavy going by the river. The crossing of the Beas had a little shaken our nerve, and so, when a Sikh Sardar kindly offered to accompany the truck in his powerful jeep, we accepted thankfully ; and it was well we did, for the truck stuck on a bank the other side of the river and was pulled out at once by the jeep. This was not the end of its difficulties. There had been heavy rain at Rupar, and the Canal authorities said the road along the canal bank—the only possible one to Chamkaur—was impassable. On personal approach—we had to push on as the local rest-house was full—they relented but said the truck must proceed with the utmost caution and take a certain diversion where the bank was being repaired. The road proved to be in better condition than any we have had for some time. But the diversion produced a perilous moment. Down the steep bank, the back wheels skidded and, with a less skilful driver than P. who was at the helm, the truck must have gone over the edge. To have ignored diversion and expert would have been safer !

Before the jeep set out on its generous errand, the Sardar took us off in it to see the fort which his ancestor

captured from the Moghuls in the troublous eighteenth century and which he and his family still occupy. I had never ridden in a jeep before, and this was a good test of its capacity. Our road was the kind which would make even an impatient horse go at a walk, but the jeep bounded over its ups and downs and round its twists and turns like a deer. The fort was impressive enough outside, but inside it was a jumble of new and old, solid masonry and shoddy woodwork, with red and green glass in the windows, narrow staircases made for defence, cattle feeding in the courtyard, and not a sign of order or comfort anywhere, but with little difference in way of life for master, man or beast—a perfect example, in fact, of a classless society. The fort walls are still strong, and when I suggested to the Sardar that they might yet come in useful—I was thinking of yesterday's mention of civil war—he replied: 'Yes, we have guns to defend ourselves.'

What a hash politics threaten to make of this tract, where Hindu, Muslim and Sikh are as mixed up as the ingredients of a well-made *pilau*.<sup>1</sup> Passing through the country between the Chenab and the Ravi, I noted how often in a village Muslim and Sikh had a common ancestor.<sup>2</sup> It is the same here with Hindu and Muslim Rajput, and today we passed a village of Hindu and Muslim Gujars. A Hindu Rajput, who is an Assistant Registrar, tells me that where he lives in Karnal to the south, there are fifty Muslim villages converted to Islam in the days of Aurungzeb. They belong to the same clan as he does, and fifteen years ago offered to return to the Hindu fold, on the one condition that their Hindu kinsfolk would give them their daughters in marriage. The condition was refused and they are still Muslim. In this area, even where Hindu and Muslim belong to different clans, they still interchange civilities at marriage, inviting mullah or Brahmin, as the case may be, to share in the feasting.

Riding along this road eighteen years ago, I was told at the village of Gahon that manure pits had been dug to please the Deputy Commissioner, who had recently been

<sup>1</sup> Rice boiled with fowl, meat or fish, and spices, raisins, etc.

<sup>2</sup> p. 76.

round. The only sign of them today was some scrappy jungle growth not quite concealing their surface. 'Why don't you dig new ones?' I asked. 'We have no time' was the unconvincing excuse. But the eighteen years are not without one or two signs of material progress. A carpenter's fine two-storeyed house, which once towered over a collection of hovels, the dwellings of his less fortunate neighbours, now has a number of brick houses round it. Better still, in another village rows of stripling trees have become an orchard laden with oranges. We were presented with a basketful by the kindly owner, and for courtesy's sake we took three—one each for A., the groom and myself. With that generous hospitality which marks every peasant countryside, however poor, many press their oranges upon us. It is difficult to refuse—especially after the orangeless years of the war—and yet slightly embarrassing to accept, in a country where it is not always easy to discern the line between a gift from the heart and a gift from the mind; and even now, though I can do nothing for anyone, I cannot be quite certain that this is always understood.

The most I can do is to tell Authority of some complaint or need. But Authority tends to think itself omniscient and is not always ready to learn from the passer-by. The passer-by, too, may easily be deceived. So I have only dared to write thrice. Today I am tempted to do it a fourth time. For, as we approached the Sutlej, people from three villages in turn complained to us that some of their precious grazing areas (not those in the Siwalik hills close by) had been closed to grazing without their being consulted. The complaint had a genuine ring about it, and at one point a dozen rustics came careering down the hillside hookah in hand, when they caught sight of us trotting along below. Those who live on the outer edges of a district are badly placed for complaint, since officials rarely ride from one district to another. Here the nearest rest-house is at Balachaur, ten to fifteen miles away, and the road is not one to tempt a man with a good car. With a horse any spot can be reached, but those who can afford to keep a horse mostly keep a car, and the others depend on bicycle, tonga and bus, with a marked preference for the bus.

The rich garden land, which is such a pleasant feature of the Hoshiarpur District, was now left behind. In the fifteen miles to the river, I saw only two orchards, and mango groves were few and far between ; other trees too, when the wide empty riverain of the Sutlej opened out before us. The Sutlej itself was almost as dry as the fifty torrent beds we have crossed since leaving Dasuya, and we could detect no flow in either of the two large pools through which our horses splashed their way into the Ambala district.

The twelve miles on to Chamkaur had two pleasant moments—the first, when we did our 500th mile ; the second, when we fell in with a young Sikh Captain, his thick black hair circled by a pale blue puggree. He overtook us on a bicycle, and hearing A. say to another cyclist, who was shy of passing us, ‘ The road is as much yours as ours ’, he stopped to talk to us. He was just back from Burma on leave. Before that he had been with Wilson in Syria ; so he had seen something of the outside world. It was perhaps owing to this that he felt, as he said, an Indian first and a Sikh second, and he wished that everyone else would put India first. What he and his kind in the army want, is a united India. In his village Sikhs predominate, but there are also Hindus and Muslims and they all live happily together. It is ‘ the middle-class educated ’, as he called them, from the town who stir up trouble in the village. The fully educated see how wrong this is, and he maintained that communal strife sprang from too little, and not too much education. Before leaving us, there was a characteristic offer of hospitality. ‘ I live in a small village and there isn’t much food, so I’m afraid all I can bring you is a little drink.’ It was late and we rode on wearily, but as warmed within as any drink could have made us.



## Chapter V

### SUTLEJ TO JUMNA

#### I—RAJPUT, COMMUNIST AND SIKH

*January 5—Chamkaur—Halt*

Here for the first time we found no arrangement made for our horses. All that was offered them after their 25-mile ride was a stable full of buffaloes and smelling so foul that the good Baldeo, our head groom, exclaimed angrily, 'It is my *marzi*—my will—that they should not stay here.' Stay there they did, but not till the little herd had been cleared out and the mass of filthy straw below them removed and fresh straw spread. Even so it was long before the stink grew bearable, and today they were covered with ticks.

We got over the Sutlej just in time, for it rained all night and again this morning, and it was lucky we had planned to halt here a day, as the road for our next march was impassable. A day's halt after much marching is an agreeable interlude, but there was plenty to do, writing up my diary, thinking out plans for the future, and in the afternoon going to see a village of Sikh Jats three miles away. The village (Katlaur) has only about sixty houses, and like many small villages it is a good village, where people help themselves and each other. It has a panchayat, which settles the few disputes that arise, and no one has been to court for seven years. There are five Co-operative societies—for thrift and credit, consolidation of holdings, better farming, cattle breeding, and for first aid to cattle. Consolidation has helped them most, and the gain in income was put at sixteen annas in the rupee, i.e. at 100 per cent. This is the highest figure ever given me, but when challenged they stuck to it and said that they had sunk six new wells, each with two sets of Persian wheels, and added a second set to each of their three old ones. The average size of their fields, too, has been increased from less than half an acre to over  $3\frac{1}{2}$  acres.

I noted the other day that few now visit temple or Gurdwara except on special occasions. It is characteristic of the Sikhs in this village that many of them visit the Gurdwara every morning for a few minutes before going to their work. Some stay to listen to the *Granth Sahib*,<sup>1</sup> which the Granthi<sup>2</sup> (a Jat from Amritsar) recites, but most go there only to do the *matha tekna*—to bow the head to the ground before the *Granth Sahib* so that 'we may remember God in our work during the day'.

So good a village deserves a school, especially as they are ready to provide a house for it. The boys, twenty-six of them, have to go to one two miles away. The girls' only resource is the Granthi, who teaches ten or twelve of them to read and write. These good people had no doubt that girl and boy should be treated alike, but there is the usual disparity in the tehsil—five High Schools for boys and none for girls.

I was sitting in a small room packed with Sikhs sitting on the floor below elbow to elbow, beard to beard, and overflowing through the two doors into the verandahs outside. When I got up to go, the serried mass rose with me and I was wondering how I should get out through so many beards, when someone mentioned the magic word *azadi*. It was at once taken up by others in a babel of voices—a striking manifestation of the new wind that blows, for no newspaper is taken in. There was the usual pause when I asked what they would do when free which they could not do at present. I get more and more the impression that the peasant's desire for freedom is a desire for a state rather than an opportunity, a state enjoyed by other countries and demanded by self-respect. They were all most friendly about it and I rode away with new hope, as I always do after seeing Co-operation doing what it should in a village. In this part of the Punjab, from the Beas to the Sutlej and a little beyond, it has justified the high hopes we had of it thirty years ago.

With David 'fresh as a rose' and eager for his dinner, I did not take long to scamper back the three miles across

<sup>1</sup> The Sikh scriptures

<sup>2</sup> A Sikh priest.

the soft sandy soil against a reddening sky and a darkening horizon.

*January 6—Chamkaur to Garhi—14 miles*

Today I was asked to interpret something I wrote thirty-seven years ago! It was a lengthy report about the allowances due to the relatives of the head of a tiny State in the Simla hills. One of the relatives, a Rajput, motored out from Rupar this morning to gain my support in a dispute about his allowance. The Political Agent had given the point first in his favour and then in favour of the State. The decision turned upon the report. The Rajput showed me a copy of it and begged me at great length to give him a note that his claim was just. But on re-reading it—not too bad, I thought, for 29—I came to the conclusion that he was wrong, and he drove sadly away. Like the State, which measures perhaps a dozen square miles, the dispute was a miniature affair, turning on whether the Rajput had the right to succeed to a payment of thirty rupees (£2 5s.) a year. He holds a well-paid Government post, and when I pointed out that thirty rupees would buy barely three maunds of wheat, he said it was a question of status and family honour. For that the Rajput will fight to his last rupee.

My visitors included two Sikh gazetted officers. Both were against the present system of separate communal electorates, and one said, apropos of Pakistan, 'Give us joint electorates and we want nothing else.' I have long thought that Montagu's crucial mistake was to accept the principle of communal electorates introduced by the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909. Far better to have said 'either joint electorates or not these Reforms'. The Reforms would then have had to be on lines which did not involve settling everything by the counting of heads, a system which is naturally anathema to the Muslim League and the *fons et origo* of Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> It was, I think, the European Chamber of Commerce in Calcutta which

<sup>1</sup> The India Constituent Assembly has abolished the system of separate electorates, which the report of the Advisory Committee concerned described as 'one of the main stumbling blocks to the development of a healthy national life' (September 1947).

pointed out that the Montagu-Chelmsford Reform scheme with its Parliamentary basis involved for India a fundamentally unsound system of government. For, they said, you can have either a European system run by Europeans or an Indian system run by Indians, but not a European system run by Indians or vice versa. And Pundit Motilal Nehru must have been thinking on the same lines when, speaking in the Legislative Assembly in 1924, he said: 'What I want . . . is a system which is native to India and of which you have no experience in Europe and America.' I was amused at one remark made by one of the Sikhs—that in battle one Sikh was equal to a hundred Muslims. Much the same, heightened only by oriental imagination, as what I used to be told as a child, that one Englishman was equal to three Frenchmen. And I have no doubt that, as I have learnt to think better, so too will my friend.

The ride to Garhi, at first along the canal and then along the fields beside it, was full of lovely sights: waving lines of cranes flying high in V-shaped array and filling the sky with their melodious croakings; a peacock winging its way across the canal and alighting on the farther bank in a ray of sunlight; in the fields beyond three gazelles standing all grace and innocence and touched to stillness by the peace and beauty of the evening; and far away the Daulah Dhar arrayed from sky to earth in snow and indescribably lovely as the last sunlight turned the white radiance to rose and the great mass of rock and cliff into a symbol of the indestructible.

### *January 7—Halt at Garhi*

With so much snow on the hills, the cold last night was acute, and I crowded on everything I had. But in bed it attacks one from below, and against that a cotton quilt is but a thin defence. How perfect, though, is the sunshine when the sun is well above the tree-tops, and how green the young wheat after the rain.

A Muslim Rajput from a neighbouring district, in close touch with officialdom, came to see me this morning, and sitting out in the sunshine, we talked for nearly two hours, the Rajput conversing in fluent English. In the days of

one of the Moghul emperors—he did not know which—his ancestor, the son of a Rajputana chieftain, migrated to the Punjab on his conversion to Islam, leaving the *gaddi*—the chieftaincy—to his brother, who remained a Hindu. The ancestral tie still holds, thanks to a Muslim member of his family returning home at a later stage. At a guess, I should have taken the Rajput with his dark skin and plump round face for a Hindu. His quick easy talk, too, suggested a Hindu rather than a Muslim brain.

Till two or three years ago when, under the influence of the League, the gulf began to widen, Hindu Bhats<sup>1</sup> from Rajputana would come every year with their long ledger-scrolls to record in them any additions to the family. They visited the whole clan in turn, getting five or ten rupees from each member, according to his means. As with the Bhatti Rajputs along the Chenab,<sup>2</sup> horoscopes were cast for those who wanted them, but in the last fifteen years not many did. His own horoscope was very prudently cast, for its only prophecy is that one day he would cross the ocean. This was not the only tie with Hinduism. According to old Rajput custom, the Brahmin would be called in at a wedding to 'proclaim' the dowry, and this he did in the deprecating terms of those who are convinced there is nothing to deprecate. The family, he would say, was of the humblest and in no way equal to the family honouring it with its alliance; nor had it the means to give more than the paltry dowry set out before the guests—no one spent less than Rs. 10,000—but poor as it was, would they graciously accept it? A daughter's marriage on these lines was an expensive affair, nor was it easy to find a suitable bridegroom. Hence the lamentation that used to greet the birth of a daughter and, until the British stopped it, their secret disappearance, as indeed used to happen in his own family. One Hindu custom still prevails: a widow may not remarry, and till now no widow in his family has ever done so. 'It is doubtless a harsh custom,' he said, 'for some are married only a few days before their husbands die.'

<sup>1</sup> A Brahmin sub-caste.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 76.

He agreed that the sundering of the old ties between Hindu and Muslim was a pity, but in the last five years each community was losing confidence in the other, and this, he said, was affecting the administration. Officers no longer trust the subordinates of a different community. A Hindu Deputy Commissioner on tour, who is not a member of the I.C.S., will call the Hindu Deputy-Tehsildar into his room for a talk, leaving the Muslim Tehsildar to wait outside, and vice versa if he is a Muslim; and when an Indian is appointed Deputy Commissioner, the subordinates of the rival community will try to get away to another district.

As an aristocrat, he was critical of the appointments now commonly made from the new and prosperous middle class. 'It is easy to become a lawyer, but how can those who have neither training nor birth become good rulers? You have given us as rulers men who knew how to handle others, who knew the etiquette of ruling and how to keep their dignity. But now people are jumping up with no background or experience', and he mentioned the case of an Assistant Surgeon who used to give false certificates in legal cases and during the war got into the I.M.S.

As he was speaking of this and other problems, my eye was caught by three carts drawn by white bullocks crossing the green wheat fields in slow solemn procession, and in the sunlight, with the snows of the Daulah Dhar behind, the sight was so beautiful that for a moment I forgot all India's troubles and could only see her beauty.

But it was only a moment, for we now plunged into politics. Freedom was a good cry, he said, but no one in the village understands what it means. Few can read a newspaper, and most are at the mercy of the local bania<sup>1</sup> who takes one in and reads out *his* version of the news to those seated round his shop—how, for example, 'Nehru has given a dinner to the Viceroy and the Viceroy walked barefoot to his house'! Or they hear equally garbled accounts from the three or four half-educated unemployed to be found in most villages of the neighbourhood. These constantly bicycle to the nearest town and retail the news

<sup>1</sup> A Hindu shopkeeper, who is often a money-lender as well.

on their return, describing perhaps how the British are taking money out of the country and how, with freedom, they will have fewer taxes to pay and will be able to manage things as they like. (This recalled what I have heard more than once myself.) The Hindus, continued the Rajput, are politically awakened ; so, too, 50 per cent of the Sikhs, but the Muslims' only idea of politics is to defend themselves against the Hindus 'that they may not take anything from us or oppress us'. It is this fear of Hindu domination, he said, particularly at the centre, which makes every Muslim a Leaguer at heart, however much he may desire unity in the Punjab.

'And what do you think should be done now ?' I asked.

'You should not go until things are settled : otherwise there will be bloodshed. The Muslims are pleased with the English, but they think you are handing them over to the Hindus, and they don't want to come under banias.'

'But what if Jinnah refuses to come into the Constituent Assembly ?'

'He will certainly come in, but he will wait his time. He is a Khoja' and understands how to deal with banias.'

This afternoon A. and I rode out to a small village of Muslim Rajputs across the sandy lands of the Sutlej riverain. I never feel happier on a horse than in the riverain of a Punjab river. The country is wide and open, trees ring the horizon without obscuring the view, the softness of the ground sets one's horse agog and gives a pleasant muffled sound to his hoofs, undulations break the monotony of the plain and lend the tiniest touch of excitement to a gallop, and then, even when unseen, the presence of a great river acts like a tonic on the mind.

The Sutlej was once the northern boundary of our sway. British and Sikh eyed each other suspiciously across its mile-wide bed and fought some of their bloodiest battles near its banks ;<sup>2</sup> and even now it seems to divide Hindustan, not from Pakistan, which is still but a battle-cry, but from the Punjab proper, which has a life and character all its

<sup>1</sup> A caste of Muslim traders 'well known for their wealth and commercial enterprise' (Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, p. 252).

<sup>2</sup> At Aliwal and Sobraon.

own. Those who live on its banks are a link between the two. Most of them are Muslims of Hindu descent, and characteristically the Rajputs in our village used to call in a Brahmin of the neighbourhood to their marriages, but twenty years ago, yielding to the unhappy trend of the times, they gave it up.

The houses in the village had newly-plastered walls, a rich golden brown, the colour of gur. All but one (of burnt bricks) had collapsed in last year's monsoon rain and almost all, about fifty of them, had been rebuilt, at an average cost of roughly Rs. 500 (£37 10s.). It was not the only example of self-help. The lanes had been paved (with the help of Government) and each house had contributed Rs. 20. Fields have also been consolidated with, it was said, a gain of four annas in the rupee. A Sikh Jat from elsewhere put the gain in his village (as at Katlaur) at sixteen annas, and he had the look of a man who knew what he was talking about. The village has a Co-operative society for thrift and credit, and another for better living. The latter had introduced compulsory education, but this was one of the many pious aspirations which do not go beyond resolution or by-law, for only six boys go to school. When I asked the reason, one answer was, the parents cannot afford the ten rupees a year it costs a boy in books, pens and ink. Yet when we came to smoking, a habit beloved of Rajputs, all but two admitted they were smokers and it was agreed that it cost them about two rupees a month. (Another Rajput village gave me the same figure.) But is it fair to compare the cost of a habit with the cost of an improvement, especially when the habit is a pleasant vice? It is as beloved by the Rajputs as tea by the Pathans. Round Bhimpur, where we spent Christmas and were on the edge of Rajput country, all seemed to go about hookah in hand; and the other day when I met the Rajputs of Balachaur and asked those who didn't smoke to put up their hands, only one of the twenty present did so, and the one sitting by me confessed to twenty or thirty cigarettes a day.

The president of the thrift and credit society was an old man of about eighty with a small reddish-brown face, all lines like a network of wires. I asked him what was his



earliest memory. Wheat selling, he said, at two maunds to the rupee, and ghi at a little over three seers. And now wheat sells at ten rupees a maund, and ghi at five rupees a seer. But he did not see an orange until after the first war, and in his youth no one wore muslin, only the enduring homespun. In those days, he went on, a man with a hundred rupees was rich, and men would come from round about to look at him.

Two soldiers back from the war were present. One had received a bonus of a thousand rupees, and the other, an Arain, a bonus of 300. The Arain said he had been not only to Burma but also to 'Urope', and as he said so, he looked at me with hostile eyes.

'To what country in Europe?'

'To Taranto.'

'And what country is that in?'

'It is in Urope.' And that was all he could, or would, say about it, except that there the people are free, and here they are slaves.

'And are all the people here really slaves?' I asked. The people round grinned, but his morose look continued and he went on to say (almost in echo of what I had heard in the morning) that they wanted to stop money going out of India.

'But', I objected, 'it is just the other way—here you are coming back from abroad with 300 rupees and this soldier here with a thousand.' More grins.

Riding back we sighted, some 400 yards ahead, a string of antelope. One of the half-dozen riding with us started after them full gallop, and away they went, leaping, as ballet dancers might in their dreams, over mound and bush, leaving horse and rider far behind.

### *January 8—Garhi to Khanna—14 miles*

Full moon last night, marking one of the special days for going to temple or Gurdwara, and whoever has seen a full moon in all her splendour in the East must once at least in his life have been drawn to worship; and also, it must be admitted, to curse, if it was to lie sleepless in the hot weather under her burning eye. Last night there was

nothing to fear and, when I went to bed, she was high in the heavens, with a scarf of softest white down in magic circle round her.

We could not tear ourselves away from this attractive spot till the afternoon, and then followed a march of unusual interest. Except for an Arain Inspector, I was accompanied the whole way by Sikhs, whether zaildar, sufedposh, kanungo or sub-inspector. I asked what they thought of Mahatma Gandhi and was surprised at their reply :

‘To us he is no Mahatma.’

‘But surely you think him a good man?’

‘He is not good. He only is good from whom there is advantage and in whom there is truth. He is of the party of the *Lala Log*—the bania people—and from them there is great harm to us zemindars.’<sup>1</sup> The kanungo, who knows the tract well, said that the untouchables, too, had no faith in Gandhi. As to the *Lala Log*, this was not the only bitter expression on the march against the banias of the neighbourhood. In the old days it would have been inspired by their money-lending extortions. Now it is by the way they handle sugar and cloth.

The high light of the afternoon was an open-air meeting at a large village (Uttalan) on the roadside attended by many Sikhs, including three Communists. I guessed I was having to do with a Communist when a large, well-fed, black-bearded man in the front row, with a sickly-looking infant in his arms, began orating against religion. ‘It is religion that makes us quarrel and prevents us being free. It is religion that doesn’t let us improve Hindustan. Religion is a dangerous thing : because of it there is no life in Hindustan,’ and so on. He grew increasingly excited under the flow of his oratory and began attacking ‘the rule of foreigners’. ‘Your country has made us weak,’ interjected a Brahmin shopkeeper, also squatting in the front row ; ‘we want you to go.’ At this frank statement the gathered beards buzzed with disapproval. ‘No, no,’ I said, ‘let him say what he likes. I want to hear his views. That is why I have come. But one little thing I want to say first. The Sahibs of my race also want to go, and as soon as

<sup>1</sup> Land-owners, however small ; in this case peasant proprietors.

possible.' This took the Communist by surprise. So I added : ' But my worthless opinion is that neither should you send them away, nor should they choose to go. They should stay, but as brothers and equals. England needs Hindustan in the affairs of the world, and Hindustan needs England in its own affairs.' To this simple statement—village meetings don't go in for urban refinements—all, even the Communist, agreed.

' Now,' I said, turning to him again, ' I want to hear *your* views. I know the views of the Communist in England because I have Communist friends, but what is it that the Communist in India wants ? '

' As long as there is a foreign Government, our ends cannot be realized.'

' But what are your ends ? '

' Everyone who is grown-up should have a vote. That is the first thing.'

' And the second ? '

' The land should be only for those who cultivate it. No one should have more than 120 bighas,' enough land for two ploughs and no more. And where there are factories, what is produced should be divided amongst the men.'

He was talking excitedly about all this when A. said something to me in a whisper. ' Stop a moment,' I said to him. ' My daughter says you are holding your child dangerously—look at it.' He looked down and exclaimed : ' It is true, my thoughts had wandered a little bit away from it to you,' and he rearranged the bundle in his arms.

' How many in the villages are on your side ? ' I continued.

' About half ; the other half don't understand.'

Only one of the three Communists spoke. They were all landowners, but two owned only ten acres and the third eighteen. The spokesman complained bitterly of their poverty and of how there was almost nothing to eat but bread made out of maize flavoured with young turnip leaves and washed down with buttermilk. And here I must quote from A.'s diary : ' I went to look at the Communist's

<sup>1</sup> He was referring to the cutcha bigha, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an acre. See also p. 186 (n).

baby, a lifeless little creature as small as M. was at two months, although it was five months old, and its head still wobbled as though held to its body by the slenderest thread. In reply to my inquiries, its father eloquently uplifted his hands and declared, "How can it be otherwise when the state of the people is so weak? Even the babies have nothing to eat."

"Is the mother weak?" I asked.

"Yes, yes, she too has nothing to eat."

"Well then, you should give her some of *your* food. You are a strong well-fed man, you should give your food to the mother of this baby."

This unexpected attack caused great mirth, and with a nice smile my Communist said: "Achcha, Memsahib—I'll do it." I borrowed two rupees from the Inspector with us and gave it him for his baby. He was very taken aback and shook his head, saying—"No, no, I didn't mean that."

It was the most argumentative meeting I have had since the Red Shirt one at Shewa,<sup>1</sup> but quite one of the friendliest.

I have made many inquiries along our route about Communists, mainly from the Sikh officials riding with me, because in the village most Communists are Sikhs, just as in the town most are Hindus. Muslims are little attracted. In Gujranwala, north of the Ravi, I was told that every Sikh village had an adherent or two, but, south of the Beas, the only area where they have any importance is round Mahilpur, where many Sikh emigrants have returned with new wine in their heads. There was a taste of this at my meeting there.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere there is only a sprinkling, and that, too, is confined to Sikh villages. A Jat Sikh who came to see me this morning says that in his tehsil (Samrala) they exist in only a few villages, and that in the last election the Communist candidate polled only 22 votes. In the Punjab generally, the party was crushingly defeated by the Akali Sikhs. Strong religious feeling was aroused, and this was their undoing, for they are popularly supposed to be against religion, and, as we have just seen, not without reason.

The Communist, said an experienced Assistant Registrar,

<sup>1</sup> p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> p. 98.

is generally more intelligent than his fellows, and as a party they are more honest than other parties, by which I think he meant their motives were more disinterested. The trouble is they are always stirring up strife, in town and factory organizing strikes, in the village turning tenant against landlord and everyone against the British, who, I boldly maintain, are still the peasant's best friend. In the village they usually belong to the class of small owners who have too little land to mind much if it is nationalized. Nationalization of the land is one of their three main objects; the other two are protection for tenants—much needed in the Punjab, where 48 per cent of the land is farmed by unprotected tenants-at-will—and better living conditions. Apropos of the latter, the Communist party, said the Assistant Registrar, is the only one that takes any real interest in rural reconstruction. In the past, Congress in the Punjab has been too much dominated by its urban outlook, and the League by its feudal magnates. In the competition for votes and power both are now paying more attention to the peasant, though, in my experience, few know much about him outside their own particular areas, and then only if they are village-bred.

If one had to single out one quality as pre-eminently characteristic of the Punjab peasant, it would be his generous hospitality. When we returned to our horses, which we had left outside the village, there happened to be some Sikh peasants close by, turning the juice of their cane into gur. Seeing us, out they came with handfuls of the precious sweetmeat and pressed it upon us, and when we refused all but a token mouthful or two, nothing would stop them from cramming it into the greedy jaws of our horses, until even Goliath was surfeited.

Riding on, I asked a Sikh with us, who was deputizing for his zaildar father, what *he* thought was the Punjabi's best quality. Without a moment's hesitation and laughing loudly, he said: '*Dang bahadur*—he's a fine fellow with a stick.'

'And what is his worst quality?'

'He spoils for a fight. He drinks, and drink makes a man quarrelsome and violent. Since we have grown rich with the groundnut crop, people put their money into drink.'

‘And what do you think the Englishman’s best quality?’

‘He is a devotee of time: at night he will drink and dance, and the next morning he will be at work at the proper time.’

‘Now, Sardar Sahib, tell us the truth—don’t be afraid, we shan’t mind what you say: what is the Englishman’s worst quality?’ For a long time he considered, and one could see thought lining his large face. Was he thinking how he could turn his reply to an awkward question into a compliment? And he almost did, for at last he said: ‘In former days good men came to us from England, men of good family who understood us, but those who have come out more recently look at us with evil look.’ It would have been ungracious to contradict, or even disagree with so courteous a reply, so I said: ‘To some extent you are right, Sardar Sahib. Too many men have come out to your country who do not like it, but there are many who love it.’

His point is one that is frequently made, but I myself would say that the I.C.S. men who came out to the Punjab after the first war were every bit as good as those who came out before it. A case of ‘*circumspice*’.

The son was unusual, but the father, who came to see me here, was remarkable. He might have been any age from seventy upwards, so lined and grey was he; but he had a vitality that any young man might envy. It is such as he who make the Sikhs stand out so unmistakably amongst the tribes and races of India. As A. says, they have just the qualities that India needs—energy, enterprise, independence: too much independence, perhaps, for, as another Sikh said to me, ‘our only care is for ourselves’. This makes it difficult for them to pull together, though they are bound together by the closest of communal ties. The father said there were three parties amongst them. The Panthic and the Congress parties were the two main branches, but in the Panthic party the Majha Sikhs of Lahore and Amritsar were divided from the Malwa Sikhs.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Malwa is the country immediately south of the Sutlej, the Majha (or Manjha) the country between the Sutlej, the Beas and the Grand Trunk road, i.e. most of the districts of Amritsar and Lahore.

When I asked whether Communists did not form a fourth party, he almost spat at the thought that men who were open enemies of religion could be counted Sikhs.

Our way on to Khanna lay through a rich country of wheat, cane and rape, the rape brilliant with its mustard-yellow flowering. 'Do you get any pleasure from looking at that?' I asked the zaildar's son.

'Why not? See, there is much yellow on the green and all is shining in the sun, and there is sugar-cane and people with different colours. There is much pleasure in it.'

Even lovelier was the gold and purple sunset, as we entered Khanna. But none of those we passed looked at it for even a moment. They seemed to find us much more interesting, not because we were riding—in the Punjab that is not yet an unfamiliar sight—but because we were leading our horses instead of riding them. It was the last mile and our horses were tired.

## II—TWO SIKH STATES

### *January 9—Khanna to Nabha—25 miles*

The most surprising thing about India is her contrasts. This morning we had our sandwich breakfast on the roof of a Mahant's abode in the middle of a village of mud-walled houses and muddy unpaved lanes, and now we are staying in a palace furnished in the most modern and doubtful style at a cost of five or six lakhs (about £40,000). To me its supreme luxury is the mattressed bed, into which I sank this afternoon, after the 25-mile ride, as into softest down, all the more welcome as sleep last night was broken by a call for help from the faithful but aged Baldeo, who lay near our horses bent in pain from a chill.

We are now in an Indian State<sup>1</sup>—with a Sikh ruler—and my object in riding through it, and I hope to ride through others, is to compare conditions in States with those in British India, not an easy task, but worth attempting as they represent two very different systems of government.

<sup>1</sup> Nabha is about the same size as Luxembourg (1,000 sq. miles), with a population of 340,000 (1941).

The first difference I noticed was that untouchability has not yet lost its reproach. A fine old Jat Sikh of the tough white-bearded type, who rode along with us, said that in his village all but the very young still sprinkled themselves with water if accidentally touched.

'What happens', I asked, 'when untouchables go to school?'

'None has ever yet been to school.'

'But now a new wind blows.'

'Yes, yes indeed; everyone wants freedom.'

'And do you want it, too?'

'All want it,' and he added with a laugh—'What the world wants, everyone wants.' The case in a nutshell.

In the fields I noticed no American cotton, only the indigenous variety, and very little Coimbatore cane. The cultivation, too, seemed less thorough than what we have seen since Gurdaspur. It was particularly noticeable with the irregular little ridges dividing one plot from another where irrigation is by well. But then holdings have not been consolidated, and without consolidation, as I am never tired of repeating, there can be no agricultural progress worth the name. There were some attempts at hedging, though nothing to match the castor-oil plant hedges we saw near Garhi. But climatic conditions here are not so favourable. The soil is sandy, the rainfall less, and the people are Powadh Sikhs, who lack the enterprise and stamina of the Malwa Sikhs, amongst whom we were yesterday. The State also does less for them. Co-operation is only just starting, and cattle-breeding is not as much encouraged as in the Punjab. At the Mahant's village, a large herd were waiting to be taken out to graze by the hired Gujar—at harvest he gets a fixed quota of grain per animal—but they were a poor rib-showing lot. And very different are the plough cattle from the noble beasts we met on the roads and saw in the fields in Hoshiarpur.

But there is another side to this. I asked an intelligent young Sikh official, riding with us on one of the Maharaja's finest horses, what advantages he would claim for State rule. Speaking with some months' experience of administration in British India during the war when he was under training



in the Majha, he said—less corruption and a less overbearing police. Some years ago, he thought, there was not much to choose between the police of the two areas, but he added, ‘It is not possible for a policeman here to torture a man to death and get off scot free as in British India.’ He swore he had come across a case of this during his training. If so, the case must have broken down in court, as so many murder cases do with perjury rife and commanding a high figure.<sup>1</sup> Continuing, he said he was sent to spend ten days at a police station to study police methods. The methods were adapted to a brutal and lawless tract, the most lawless in the Punjab.<sup>2</sup> To maintain law and order, the police on their rounds would pick out some noted bad character and give him a shoebeating in public. He had seen it done several times, and said the law-abiding appreciated this crude but effective way of keeping the gangster elements under some sort of control. Even so, murders were common and more than once he saw corpses floating down the canal.<sup>3</sup>

This set me wondering by what standards police methods should be judged—certainly not by those of the Sermon on the Mount, still less by those of the Gestapo. But what a range of possibilities lies in between, and how varied is practice in different countries! One is tempted to say that a country gets the police it deserves. To some extent this is true: but its aim should be to get the police it *needs*, the kind that will protect the law-abiding from the lawless, and in tracts like the Majha this may involve Draconian measures. But one measure—torture—should be anathema.

A further advantage claimed for States by the Sikh was that matters could be decided far more promptly than in British India with all its red tape. That is true enough when you have as Diwan or Chief Minister a man who is determined to get things done, for rule is personal, regulations simpler, and areas generally much smaller. But how is a State to secure a succession of such men? A good man

<sup>1</sup> cf. pp. 22 and 154.

<sup>2</sup> See *Wisdom and Waste*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>3</sup> Inquiry suggests that this account is somewhat exaggerated, but the police were admittedly given a free hand in order to keep the gangster elements under control. The massacres in the following August showed how brutal these elements were.

is not easily found locally, and if one is brought in from outside, he is subject to the temptations of temporary service. Then there is the Ruler himself. Over 2,000 years ago Socrates said that 'most of those in power prove to be bad'. Indian State history exemplifies this. But it also justifies his further remark that 'there is nothing to prevent good men being found even among these (the powerful), and it deserves our special admiration when they are'.

The Mahant on whose housetop we breakfasted was a good example of the benevolence and dignity which often go with the grey beard in the Punjab village. He was a Sikh and an Udasi ascetic<sup>2</sup> and was in charge of an attractively arched Gurdwara built on housetop level. He also dispensed Vedic medicines, with the appropriate treatment. His specialities were paralysis, fistula, dysentery, pneumonia and syphilis and he claimed twenty patients a day. 'And how many come to the Gurdwara for prayer every day?' 'Very few.'

'Then it is your ministrations to the body rather than the spirit which the people appreciate.' This irreverent comment made him laugh, but he said sadly that twenty years ago men were worshippers of God, but not now. He spent, so he told us, fifteen years absorbing *vidhya*—wisdom—in Benares, but a much shorter time in getting his medical diploma from some Vedic college of medicine. Benares, or Kashi as he called it, giving it its ancient name, was the best place to acquire knowledge, but for health, peace and goodwill, the village was best, for there men loved each other. Would it were always so! Our talk, which touched on deeper problems even than politics, ended in my declaring that I was his *chela* or disciple. Laughing greatly, he exclaimed: 'Aye, an old chela of an old man!' When we came away he presented each of us with a muslin bag full of almonds and shook me affectionately by the hand.

From the Mahant's clean dignified abode we went to see the headman's house. And what a contrast—cattle and

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 526. Trs. W. R. M. Lamb.

<sup>2</sup> Udis are an order of ascetics founded by Sri Chand, the eldest son of the first Sikh Guru. They are for the most part celibate and practise Hindu rites.—Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, p. 228.

humans sharing the general disorder and shabbily dressed women churning in front of a smoking fire. We returned to our horses which we had left standing under a *tribaini*—banyan, pipal and neem, all growing so close together as to make three in one, one in three—a symbol, as A. pointed out, of the union that should be between Hindu, Muslim and Sikh and which, to some extent, we found in Hoshiarpur last week. The banyan and the pipal are sacred, and rightly so, for they are to be found from one end of India to the other. Their sanctity is doubled when grown together. But here again there is change. Till not very long ago the pipal was so venerated that even when it died it would not be touched; but now its branches, in which the gods love to sit listening to the music of its leaves, are lopped for the hungry camel, and when it dies, it is used for fuel.

The most marked difference I noticed during our long ride was the submissiveness of the people. I was back in the India of forty years ago. Every hand was lifted in salute, not just a formal greeting but with palm pressed to palm, the fingers sometimes intertwining, and with chin almost touching chest. Monarchy here still reigns unchallenged, as it did, until the Great War, in the person of Collector or Deputy Commissioner throughout the Indian countryside. But in Nabha itself, with the propaganda of Congress and League, there are heard the mutterings of a new era. Meanwhile, it can claim one advantage not always to be had in more democratic Indian cities—it is clean, far the cleanest town we have seen on this tour. When twenty odd years ago the Maharaja abdicated, a British Administrator was appointed and a Municipal Committee created, but after six months' maladministration it had to be abolished!

### *January 10—Nabha to Patiala—17 miles*

Today we entered the premier Sikh State of Patiala.<sup>1</sup> Our ride was in curious contrast to yesterday's. Up to the very threshold of the Guest House where, as at Nabha, we are the State's guests, we rode unaccompanied and only found the Guest House through the kindly guidance of

<sup>1</sup> In size rather larger than Northern Ireland, with a population of 1·94 millions (1941).

a passer-by whose puggree was an old towel. When we took our horses round to the stables, the only man in attendance was sunning himself on a bank with a hookah, and said he could do nothing without orders. The stables themselves told of a greater interest in cars than in horses, and the listless horses were in complete contrast to those we saw at Nabha. There were other contrasts, and altogether it has been the most barren day of our tour, and for once there is nothing to record.

*January 11—Patiala to Ambala Cantonment—32 miles*

Almost too much to record today. With our longest march before us, we had planned to get off at eight, but we were delayed by the news that a blanket had been stolen during the night from David's back—also some hairs from his tail! Yesterday A. had been asked by some rapsallion in the stables whether our horses bit and in all innocence she said no. As soon as it was known that the Prime Minister was being rung up, the blanket reappeared! It is our only theft since Peshawar.

We finally left a little before nine. We knew we were in for a long day, but how long we never guessed. We did not reach the Circuit House at Ambala until 7.30, after being on the go the whole day except for three-quarters of an hour at one village and an hour later on resting by the Ghaggar. We had 22 miles of a country road, much of it turned into an impassable morass by heavy rain last night. Again and again we had to go round, adding at least a couple of miles to the long weary road. Weary, indeed, it became when, at about five o'clock, we reached Ambala city and had to thread our way through the crowded sordid bazaars, to be told, when at last we emerged from them, that it was still five miles to the Circuit House. The last hour and a half we did on foot in the dark.

The long day and the bad road were redeemed by the country and the people, and above all by the radiant hour we spent by the Ghaggar eating our sandwiches and resting on string beds produced by the ever kindly peasants. It was a lovely scene: stretches of young wheat and yellow rape—the yellow beloved by Van Gogh—with bullock carts

fording the shallow stream, and the lower hills just seen far away beyond Ambala. The Ghaggar has more importance than size : farther down its course it lives only in the monsoon and even then disappears in the sands of Bikaner. But, it is the racial boundary between the Punjab and Hindustan, and since we crossed it, we have heard no more Punjabi, only Hindustani. The men, too, are smaller and slenderer in face and limb, but with beautiful hands to be seen even amongst the humblest.

In one respect we fared better than yesterday. Two State officials accompanied us, at first on horseback ; but very soon horses were exchanged for the safer bicycle, and on these they performed prodigious feats, riding along the ruts or across the soggy fields, tossing up and down over mound and hummock, and splashing through mud and slush. The appearance of Authority brought many out of their villages to greet us. They were obviously anxious not to say anything which could displease it, but there were three small indications of frankness. The first was a brief *sotto voce* conversation with the headman of one of the villages we stopped at. He walked alongside as I rode away a little ahead of the others, but all he had time to say was that cultivation had been very difficult owing to the depredations of the game preserved for shooting. But that was under a former Maharaja, whose reign incidentally illustrates the drawbacks of personal rule. A little later A. overheard him saying to one of the two officials : ' The village has had no oil for some months, and if your Honour, protector of the poor, could arrange that we should have some cloth and a little sugar, it will be of your great kindness.' The second indication came from a returned soldier who had evidently learnt in the army to stand up for himself. He complained of some victimization in his absence—one of his trees wrongfully felled. The third, though trivial enough, was the most significant. At one village A. asked the assembled peasants whether, like the rest of the world, they wanted freedom. Someone in the front row said yes, but there was at once a deprecating murmur from those by him, and one of the petty officials present, smoothing his beard, said : ' Why should we talk

about it when we have it already? We have our own ruler. What more do we want?' That is the question.

One of the most noticeable changes in the Punjab during the last ten years is the increasing outspokenness of the peasant, and with it, I think, a valuable increase of self-respect. This change, I should say, has scarcely begun in either Nabha or Patiala. But are not the people, perhaps, more contented? Very difficult to judge in so short a time, but I think it possible, simply because they are less self-conscious and less troubled by political propaganda, which makes no one happier. As to the administration, we have had somewhat contradictory reports about Patiala from officials working outside it but on its borders. One told us how recently, when he was driving in a hired tonga in Patiala itself, the tonga was boarded by a policeman who insisted upon being driven to his destination regardless of the official's convenience, and upon being driven free. When he asked the tonga-driver why he submitted to this, the driver replied that, had he refused, he would sooner or later have been arrested on some charge or other and kept in jail indefinitely. As against this, two other Punjab officials said, independently of each other, that conditions in the State were not too bad, and one added that while cases took far longer to decide, there was less corruption than in the surrounding districts.

All this is very difficult to assess, but one fact can, I think, be definitely stated—the village in both Nabha and Patiala enjoys fewer facilities than in the tracts we have come through. There is no consolidation of holdings; Co-operation is only just being started; schools, hospitals and dispensaries are fewer; we did not hear of any good bulls being provided for cattle-breeding—one village had bought one on its own account—and though our road today served a considerable area, there were no signs of any attempt to maintain it. After last night's rain it was naturally not at its best, but if it is like that after one night's downpour, what is it like during the three months' monsoon?

Every village we stopped at, though it was only for a few minutes' talk, had something interesting to tell us. In one, we found that the owners, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh,

were all Kambohs—one more example of how little the two-nation theory applies to the village, anyhow south of the Chenab. At another village, this time of Muslim Rajputs, two Brahmin Bhats still come every four or five years from Jaisalmer, the Rajputs' original home, to bring their family records up to date.<sup>1</sup> In a third, not a single boy went to school, though it was only three miles from Patiala, and in a fourth only one or two boys, though there was a school within two miles. Here again I was back in the atmosphere of forty years ago, when it was difficult to get the peasant, even in British districts, to send his boys to school; the excuse being that they were needed to herd the cattle and to help in house and field, an excuse still common but no longer universal.

Across the Ghaggar we were back in British India, and a few more miles brought us to Ambala City and back to the smells and squalor of Indian city life. The cantonment was clean enough, but its interminable straight roads were equally oppressive to the spirit.

### III—ALONG 'THE BIG ROAD'

*January 13—Ambala to Jagadhri—32 miles*

And now, after a much needed halt yesterday, 'we come (like Kim) to the Big Road . . . the Great Road which is the backbone of all Hind', once the highway from Ambala to Saharanpur and a link between Calcutta and Peshawar. In those days it was 'a river of life', but now, like the Patiala road, it is suffering from obvious neglect. When few ride and those in authority, for the most part, race through the countryside along new roads in cars, no one gives much thought to the old unmetalled roads along which 'poor Periwinkle's' large-wheeled bullock cart has to make its way to market. As we approached Jagadhri, we overtook long processions of them, laden with cane, and reeling heavily through the mud which curled over the rim of their wheels.

And what a road to neglect! It had been nobly planned with three lines of trees on either side and a spacious central aisle in the centre. We rode along it literally from sunrise

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 116.

to sunset, with vast open fields of wheat and rape to right and left, with shisham and mango varying the monotony of the kikar,<sup>1</sup> and with my old familiar friend, the Chor, rising above it all with a touch of snow on his 12,000-foot ridge and peak. Though offering no easy passage to the bullock cart, it was in many places as good as any horseman could wish, and even provided comparatively easy going for the Co-operative Inspector, who accompanied us on a bicycle. We hadn't gone far when we fell in with a Hindu dyer, who unpacked a bundle to show us his fabrics, making the most delicate gestures with his long fingers as he spoke to us. India's gestures are a perpetual delight. When I photographed him, he exclaimed with the innocent pleasure of a child, 'Now my photo will go to England.'

At one point we turned off the road to see a building which a Sikh village had put up at a cost of Rs. 5,000—Government gave a thousand—to house their panchayat and Co-operative societies, an attractive affair with a *tribaini*—banyan, pipal and neem—to shade the little open court in front and to remind the village of the sanctities of life and the panchayat of the obligations of office. Every village should have a panchayat, if only because, as these people said: 'In the village the truth can be known; in kacherry there is much looting.' Most panchayats ignore the village servant in choosing their committees, but here two out of the five members were tanners. When I asked those around me whether they still sprinkled themselves with water when touched by a tanner, they threw their heads back in delighted laughter, as peasants often do when one hits upon some point in their lives which they don't expect one to know. In this case they pointed to two tanners standing in the crowd and said, 'See, they mingle with us.' A big change has taken place in this respect in the last twenty years. 'We used to sprinkle ourselves with water, but not now,' said a greybeard in the Sikh village I visited near Chamkaur.<sup>2</sup> There only one of the fifteen tanner families is regarded as untouchable, and in that case because it skins the village's dead animals.

<sup>1</sup> *Acacia arabica*.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 112.



As we walked away from the village through a field of rape, sprays of its yellow flowers were gathered for us that we might enjoy its fragrance. We were prepared to enjoy anything, so beautiful was the day with every leaf on the trees, every straw on the ground, shining in the radiant sunlight. Our next stop was at the townlet of Mullana, crossing there my route of eighteen years ago.<sup>1</sup> The editor of a Lahore vernacular paper turned up at our Co-operative meeting in a smart brown lounge suit with well-brushed black hair almost dripping with oil. We had an amusing political talk, sparring at each other with cut and thrust but breaking no bones. He brought out the hackneyed charge that the English had exploited India, and was a little taken aback when I retorted patriotically that our exploitation was as nothing to the way one Indian exploits another. Of which we had a good example walking through the townlet's filthy bazaar a little later. Pointing out a large hook-nosed Pathan sitting meditatively in the sun, he said he came to Mullana from Baluchistan ten years ago with only fifty rupees in his pocket and now had 20,000, all gained from money-lending. 'If a bania gets a rupee', says the proverb, 'he will have an income of eight rupees a month.' In India, as in Bacon's England, usury is still 'the certainest means of gain'.

The editor, whose name means the Pride of Ambala, pressed us to come and have tea at his house. He was both startled and amused when A., declining the very kind invitation, said with a laugh, 'We are not going to exploit you.' We went, however, to his house in the bazaar and, despite the smart European suit, it was all confusion, with a smell of open drains. Yet he had an educated wife. A crowd of Muslims and Sikhs gathered to have a look at such unusual visitors and, while A. was talking to his wife inside—their marriage had been a love match—I asked them about their religious observances. A Muslim claimed that every day he observed the five calls to prayer, whereupon a Sikh, who had not been to his Gurdwara today, said amidst laughter: 'God has laid a heavy burden upon Muslims.'

<sup>1</sup> *Rusticus*, p. 88.

In sharp contrast to 'the Pride of Ambala' was his cousin, the president of one of the local Co-operative societies, every inch of him, clothes and all, a peasant, but modern in one excellent respect—he was as outspoken as anyone could wish. He said he was an ardent Leaguer. 'But what will you do *here*?' I asked. 'This area can never be part of Pakistan.' Leaping to attention, he exclaimed:

'Here where I stand—this *is* Pakistan.'

'Very well then, where the Sardar stands,' and I pointed to the Sikh Inspector, 'is that going to be Khalistan?'

Loud laughter at this simple retort. He wanted freedom for the usual reasons but claimed it without any touch of bitterness or insolence, and with an evident desire that the English should remain to help them with their problems.

Incidentally, he is the first peasant I have met to admit frankly and at once that the cultivator 'eats well'. Yet this is not a specially rich tract. This was the bill of fare he rattled out: 'When we rise, bread made of wheat and gram with, for most of us, a drink of buttermilk or, in the cold weather, tea. At midday, bread made of wheat with pulse and a spinach of rape leaves; in the evening, more wheaten bread, or rice, and at 8 or 9 p.m., a glass of milk before going to bed. Meat, too, every third day or so, or, if there is no meat, then eggs.'

The sun was setting as we entered Jagadhri, weary enough, but not so weary as when we reached Ambala. There is plague here, which I have not come across for many years. It's a very mild epidemic—sixteen deaths in three months, said the Tehsildar. He recalled how when he was a boy there were fifty to sixty deaths a day in his village, until his father forced the people to be inoculated. That was forty years ago when people died by the hundred thousand.

### *January 14—Jagadhri to Abdullapur*

Only four miles today, but quite enough for both ourselves and our horses after yesterday's 32. Here, at Abdullapur, I met an old Indian acquaintance, now a

<sup>1</sup> The Sikh equivalent of the Muslim demand for Pakistan.

District Medical Officer of Health, who has come from Lahore to deal with the plague. It is the bubonic, not the even more dangerous pneumonic type, and is a disease of the rat. The rat infects the fleas which live on it, and the fleas only turn to humans when the rat dies or decamps. Inoculation, said the doctor, is still not generally popular here, nor does it give complete immunity.

His service began in 1920, and since then, he said, there have been great changes. The people are far better off materially, and in the central Punjab at least there is no longer any difficulty in getting them vaccinated or inoculated. But, though they may have a greater desire for better conditions, the old inertia is still there and they are as unwilling as ever to help themselves, nor are they more alive to the importance of elementary health measures. What they need most, he thought, was a pure water-supply and clean well-ventilated houses. At present nearly all wells are uncovered and that leads to diarrhoea and dysentery, and even when covered they are rarely kept in repair. As to houses, only the new ones have windows (without glass), and owing to the rapid growth of population, the old ones are getting more and more congested. That I can well believe, for we have seen very few new ones.

The increase in population led us to birth-control. Like other men who go about the village, he is never asked a question about it and was surprised to hear of A.'s experience in yesterday's Sikh village. There were two Lady Welfare Workers there, and they told her that they had many inquiries; in the congested Jullundur District, they had been inundated with them, and even in the Sikh village they had had some, though they had been there a bare ten days.

The conditions under which women bring their children into the world are still appalling—lying on the bare floor of some dark room, with no bedding to rest on lest it should be spoilt, with no treatment but that of some untrained midwife, generally an untouchable, and indeed treated as an untouchable herself. The extraordinary thing is that, in spite of all this, population grows so rapidly. The only means open to a woman who does not want another child

is to nurse the last as long as possible, and sometimes she does this for as much as five years. Gladly would many of them sleep apart from their husbands during the dangerous period each month, but, said the Lady Welfare Officer to A., it is impossible to keep the men away. When in the past I have urged that it was time to consider how this difficult but vital problem should be dealt with, it was always to be told by doctors that Government would never allow any action to be taken. And, according to the Health Officer, still nothing is being done! A new difficulty is that Hindu, Muslim and Sikh are all encouraging fecundity to increase their numbers *vis-à-vis* each other.

The approach to Abdullapur filled us with dismay. Must we really stay in this hideous little town with its mushroom growth of factories and its sordid crowded bazaar? Yet barely a hundred yards away we found a canal rest-house whose situation made us gasp with delight. Standing on the high bank of the Western Jumna Canal, more river than canal, it looks across the plain to a new range of snow mountains, with peaks we have often marvelled at from the ridge beyond Simla. We could not resist the temptation, and after lunch off we went in the truck for our second joy-ride to see the headworks of the two canals fed by the Jumna, one flowing south-westwards to water the Punjab, the other south-eastwards to water the United Provinces. But when we got there, it was not the headworks we gazed at, but at ‘Yamuna’ herself, issuing, still unravished, from the bosom of forest-clad hills; and in the evening sunlight she richly deserved her high state as second only to ‘Gangaji’ in sanctity. Across her stream is the one jungle in the Punjab where tiger may still be shot. A sunset of saffron cloud and red skies reflected in the canal, along which our road ran, gave a magic touch to the drive back. Almost every day sunrise or sunset, sometimes both, make a lovely prelude or end to the day.

I was just settling down to record our doings when in walked the Deputy Commissioner, a Hindu member of the I.C.S., and his wife. They had motored over from Ambala to see us. Conversation naturally turned to politics. I remarked how often during the last twelve months I had

heard the possibility of civil war mentioned by educated Indians. The D.C. said that the desire for freedom was now so strong that, even if it cost 100,000 lives, many people thought it would not be too great a price to pay. (Do they ever, I wonder, include themselves in the price?) A steadying factor in the situation is that, since the doings in Bihar, Hindus are no longer afraid of Muslims and Muslims realize that excesses in one area must be paid for in another. Both sides are now on guard, and the one ray of light is that many young Hindus, and some young Muslims, too, would gladly wash their hands of communal politics and join together on a purely Indian footing.

These men, some of whom I have met, are the salt of India's earth, but their position in Government service is most difficult. At present a man's status and future depend almost entirely upon his party affiliations, and an official who holds aloof from all parties and tries to do his duty conscientiously finds himself without any backing and outstripped in his career by the time-serving and the less scrupulous. Tehsildars, Naib-Tehsildars, and Superintendents of offices, said another Deputy Commissioner, rush to the Minister concerned if some order of appointment or transfer does not suit them, and the order is often reversed. That is bad enough, but the same weakness is too often shown when some scoundrel has to be proceeded against, and not very long ago I heard from someone who should know, how a well-known member of the League had suddenly joined the party in power because he could not account for 200 bags of precious sugar entrusted to his care for distribution. He was about to be prosecuted when an order came that no action should be taken pending further inquiry. Everyone believes that it is now more profitable to gain approach to a Minister in Lahore if he can than to go to the Deputy Commissioner. The D.C.'s authority, which is the linch-pin of the administration, suffers accordingly, not yet to the same extent as on the Frontier, but with only a difference of degree.

But that is not all. The revenue administration, perhaps our greatest achievement on the administrative side, is going to pieces. The staff is both insufficient and

incompetent. I was told at Ambala of a clerk who recently was found to have secreted 330 files in a cupboard of the tehsil, some of them dating back to 1931! Then it is commonly said that Tehsildars no longer know their job, nor, with so many duties imposed upon them, can they learn it. All agree that respect for authority is seriously undermined and many say that the prestige of the executive is half destroyed. On the other hand, one good judge, speaking of his own district elsewhere, thought that Deputy Commissioners still had the necessary authority but were not prepared to use it, Indians from fear of the possible consequences, the British because they are dispirited. The only thing I have heard to set against all this is that the new Ministers are learning by experience that it is wiser to back the local staff than to suck away their authority, and one of them had gone so far as to say to a Commissioner, 'We depend on you people on the spot for the truth.' He had begun to realize what we all learnt years ago, that the farther one is from the spot the more perverted the truth. And now for my last night in the Punjab. Tomorrow we ride into the U.P.

## Chapter VI

### THE UNITED PROVINCES—SAHARANPUR TO DELHI

#### I—TO THE GANGES AND DOWN ITS CANAL

*January 15—Abdullapur to Saharanpur—20 miles*

Two Co-operative Inspectors—my old Department faithful to the last—accompanied us on bicycles to the Jumna bridge and, bidding them a feeling farewell, we crossed the wide river-bed into the U.P., first flinging a small coin into its sluggish stream in memory of a very dear Hindu friend, who always did this when he crossed one of India's sacred rivers.

The first two villages we passed did not do credit to the U.P. They were of a type all too familiar from long railway journeys across its unending plain. The villages in the Punjab are nothing to boast of, but since we left Peshawar I have seen nothing that looked so derelict and forlorn, their low mud walls cracked and crumbling and roofed with old sagging thatch. Even yesterday's riverain huts on the way to Tajewala, which were built of the same materials, had at least clean plaster and well-twisted thatch. But everything else about us smiled—the finest possible cane, superb roadside trees, mango groves young and old, seas of wheat, and rising above them all, as if floating in the sky, a line of snow peaks.

But how small are man and beast after the Punjab! The men mere manikins though with a gentler look, and the oxen in proportion, the few big ones among them lean and bony. Monkeys without number, of course, and temples more in evidence than mosques, though one village had a more imposing mosque than any we have seen since Lahore. There weren't many buses on the road—nowadays there are formidable barriers between one province and another—but Saharanpur itself seemed all buses and factories, with, however, the pleasantest of civil stations. The canal

rest-house, where we are staying, is agreeably placed in a garden with a view of the snows and with poinsettias in red full-blooded splendour; but, being under repair, it has neither window nor door, which makes dressing and undressing a very public affair. We were wondering what reception to expect in this province, upon which we have no claim, when the English Collector appeared with the offer of every kind of assistance.

*January 16—Saharanpur—Halt*

This afternoon the local Assistant Registrar took me to see a village (Sarak Dudhli) a mile or so away, and as it is my first U.P. village on this tour, it must be described in some detail.

It is of medium size with about 200 houses, and it is inhabited by a Muslim tribe (Gara) springing, it was said, from converted Brahmins. They are all tenants of an absentee landlord, whose representative was present. The land, about 440 acres, is irrigated by a canal and, thanks to consolidation, the 1,099 plots into which it was split up have been reduced to 59, and one tenant with fifty scattered round the village now has all his land in a single block. Dissension threatened to make the operation impossible, and it was only after three years of patient effort that the difficulties were finally overcome by an appeal to the people to confer a blessing on the village for which their children and their grandchildren would always remember them. And blessing it is, for they admit a gain in income of four annas in the rupee. It is a curious comment on the oft-repeated desire of Provincial Governments to do all they can for the benefit of the cultivator that this immensely important work should be going on in only three out of the forty-eight districts of the province, and even in this district the staff—one Inspector and three supervisors—is pitifully small compared with the number employed in the Punjab districts immediately to the north.

There is no boys' school in the village and, though Saharanpur is so near, only a dozen boys go there to school; and no girls, of course. Some years ago a teacher with rather dubious qualifications was sent to teach adults to



read and write. He is still here and is paid only Rs. 29 a month, less than what the sweeper at our rest-house gets. With difficulty I found one man no longer young who had learnt to read. He was a blacksmith with large gnarled fingers, and he read extracts from the *Ramayana* both fluently and with feeling. 'I now know who I am,' he said; and could there be a better reason for education? Another was about to submit himself to a test when he said sadly, and not less engagingly: 'I have become old and cannot move my tongue according to the book.'

There is a Better Living society in the village, and its secretary, a little man with a four-anna Gandhi cap on his head, proved to be a Muslim supporter of Congress. But this did not prevent him speaking scathingly of the Congress bania in a neighbouring village, whose business it is to distribute the cloth ration to the neighbourhood. 'I went for our quota and all he gave me was *gali*—abuse—and only bad cloth.' The landlord's representative, a man with the thick red and black lips of an ogre, red from chewing *pan* and black from I know not what, said that because he was a Leaguer he had been unable to get any cloth at all. There was mirth when I pointed in reply to his rather elaborate half-Western dress.

All said they wanted freedom—'that there may be no trouble to us', said one optimist. 'We shall settle our affairs ourselves,' said another. If only the village would do this instead of leaving so much to be settled by others, what a boon freedom would be!

I had a look at two houses to see how they compared with those farther north. One belonged to a man with two ploughs, the other to a man with one plough. The living rooms in the latter were dark as dungeons, with no ventilation and everything hugger-mugger, and the womenfolk in *purdah*—the case with the wives of all these Muslims. The two-plough house was not much better, only larger and with more metal vessels, but with fewer than one usually sees in the Punjab. Here the Hindu uses vessels of brass, and the Muslim vessels of aluminium or copper. No one could say why.

On my way to the village I had asked whether the many

monkeys about harmed the crops, and got the vague sort of reply which tries to conceal ignorance. The Leaguer left me in no doubt. We were standing on my way back by a field which had been sown with wheat and gram, and he pointed out how little gram there was to be seen. The monkeys had eaten the seed. They snatch at the wheat seed, too, and eat the grain of both when it ripens, but it's the gram they love. He begged me to get them removed, but that's a ticklish business with the monkey only less sacred than the cow.

*January 17—Sabaranpur to Asafnagar—25 miles*—most of it along a cross-country road as bad as the road from Patiala. More than ever does my sympathy go out to those who have to take their grain to market by one of these unmetalled roads, along which few officials of any consequence ever pass, since horse, bullock cart or bicycle are the only possible means of transport. (Our guide, a Co-operative Supervisor, sensibly chose the bicycle.) The result is that thousands of peasants, who pay taxes like everyone else, have to put up with a complete absence of modern facilities. But their isolation gives them one great advantage—they keep their traditional simplicity and hospitality: as we found to our great comfort, when mid-way we turned aside from the road across the wheat-fields to a village of Hindu Gujars (Birpur). They went at once to fetch water for our horses and while it was being brought, gave them grass to munch. For us they brought hot milk and sugar and pressed them so generously upon us that it was perhaps a discourtesy on our part to refuse them. But in these days of scarcity, should those who have all they need take from those who have so much less? As usual we had brought the horses' midday feed with us, and while their jaws were busy in the nose-bags, we talked to the people about us, who were as friendly as any we have met. They were all wearing homespun made of yarn spun by their womenfolk. These also grind the grain for their chapatis.

The Punjab peasant on the whole feeds well—who could doubt it, looking at his fine physique? But what about

his small U.P. cousin ? So I asked them what they ate, and this is what they told me : a glass of buttermilk when they get up, with any bread left over from the evening before ; at midday, more bread, and plenty of it, made of millet flavoured with pulse and with leaves of the rape, whose yellow flowers still brighten the countryside ; much the same in the evening, and perhaps a glass of milk before going to bed. They have little in the way of vegetables, and the only fruit they eat is the mango and the jaman. On the other hand, they have all the gur they want, for all along our route there were fields of cane as fine as the cane of Peshawar and Mardan.

So simple were these people that, with the exception of the headman, no one could name any higher authority than the Collector. The headman got as far as Commissioner, ' Board ' and Governor, though he was a bit hazy about the two last. No one had heard of the Ministers or knew the name of the King. ' We are of no party,' said someone in excuse ; ' our ways are those of old.' He could not have given a better excuse, but traditional simplicity has its drawbacks. They still wash person and clothes if touched by an untouchable · nor do they allow him to sit on the same durrie with them. In yesterday's village, which was almost a suburb of Saharanpur, all that remained of old prejudice was the refusal to take water from him and to lend him cooking vessels. This, it seems, is now the case where there is close contact with the outside world. But change in India has many gradations. In the second village we visited today, near Roorkee, an untouchable may sit with the owners at a village gathering but must be cleanly dressed. Cleanliness is the essence of the matter, and the first and most important step in that direction is to give up eating carrion.

To one who loves colour, the U.P., with the Hindu in the ascendant, has one marked advantage over the more Muslim country to the north. The women, though still shy and retiring, are more in evidence and lend grace and colour to village lane and well. While I was talking to the men, a number of them, old and young, gathered

<sup>1</sup> The Board of Revenue.

round A., and so closely that, sitting in their midst, she was completely hidden by their reds and blues, with a ripple of merry laughter round her.

There is little to record of the ride itself. It was a laborious affair, for only once was it possible to trot for even half a mile without having to slow down on account of ruts, mounds, water or mud. The hills, too, were hidden in mist, but the country soothed the eye with its triple beauty of wheat, mango grove, and cane. No landscape in the U.P. would be quite in character without the mango grove and its colonnades of black trunks. At about 2.30—we started as usual at 7.30—we came to a small canal with crystal-clear water—the water of Gangaji itself. Half an hour later we came to a large village (Theetki Qabadpur), where I spent  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours talking to about twenty people.

Once more I asked about food. Their fare is much the same as in the first village, including, in the case of about 50 per cent, the glass of milk before going to bed. Being strict vegetarians, they eat neither meat nor eggs. Yet pumpkin, water melon and turnip are the only vegetables they grow. Last year one of them tried cabbages, but frost killed them and he has not tried again. Peas they grow only for their cattle, not for themselves as they produce ‘gases in the stomach’. For other vegetables they depend on Roorkee four miles away or the peripatetic hawker. All had eaten the cauliflower, but one person had just seen tomatoes for the first time. Two luxuries they can count on, as luxuries go in village life : in the cold weather, gur galore ; in the hot, the juicy mango. But, owing to the growing pressure on the soil, old mango groves are being cut down to make room for more wheat and cane.

The Meerut Division, through which we are marching, is the most prosperous part of the U.P., and 95 per cent of the people, said the Assistant Registrar, get two square meals a day. In the east of the province, people are poorer and most of them get only one square meal. ‘We ate better before the first war,’ said the inevitable old stager. ‘Then we could get a buffalo for a hundred rupees ; now we must pay 500. Cotton cake was 25 seers to the rupee, now it is two seers.’ With the shortage of feeding stuffs,

too, buffaloes are giving less milk. No one would admit that they ate better for the high prices. What, then, did they spend their money on? Was it perhaps on smoking? All but two of those present were smokers, and when I asked what smoking cost them, half a dozen answered with half a dozen figures, the highest five rupees a month. It was finally agreed, as in the Punjab village,<sup>1</sup> that for an ordinary family it was about two rupees a month. That did not account for much of their extra income. Were the women perhaps the spenders? If so, what did *they* spend money on? 'Clothes' was the instant reply—no gulf there between East and West—and after that ornaments and ghi for the hair. We have seen many more ornaments—all silver or silver-plated—since we entered the U.P., and in the first village the women were wearing nose-rings, one for betrothal, and another for marriage. In the Punjab these have been largely discarded. Incidentally, only one woman in ten smokes.

The village would have a much better look if the women adorned their houses as lovingly as their persons. The one house I entered had a large courtyard with a colonnade of fine brick arches, but otherwise the look of a slum. The wall plastering, too, of most of the houses was very different from what we saw in the Punjab, and when I pointed this out, one excuse after another was made—the rain here was heavier, the earth must be inferior, and so on; yet a few houses showed what could be done. A Punjabi from near Amritsar, who happened to be present, put the Punjab's superiority down to the Jatni—the wife of the Jat, and that may well be the explanation.

Though the village has 1,200 inhabitants and is so near Roorkee, only two newspapers are taken in. When I asked those around me whether they were for Congress or some other party, they replied evasively, 'We have our king in the *wilayat*'—i.e. in England.

*January 18—Asafnagar to Tughalpur—16 miles*

Once more we couldn't resist it, and off we went, after an early breakfast, to Hardwar, twenty-four miles away,

<sup>1</sup> p. 119.

my first visit to this sacred city, sacred because it is there the Ganges leaves its mountain home. I have never seen so clean and tidy a bazaar, swept and garnished as if for the devil himself, and quite a number of devils get there—cholera, dysentery and the like—following the lakhs of Hindu pilgrims who come there from all parts of India. Many come to commit the bones of their relatives to the limpid waters of the Ganges, too limpid for such grim offerings, for there they lie white and still, ‘full fathom five’, amongst the monster fish that come swimming along with greedy ugly faces to eat more and still more of the bakemeats thrown to them by the devout. The Assistant Registrar, who was with us, had recently committed the bones of his father in this way, with a piece of gold slipped in amongst them by his mother—a common practice, for there before us was a man with fishy face, up to his knees in the water, feeling with fat foot for the dedicated coins, and no one bidding him refrain from his impious task. But wherever men flock as pilgrims, holiness and unholiness mingle together, like silt and sand in a swift-flowing river.

The scene was full of strange contrasts: at the river’s edge, on hideous concrete platforms, men muttering prayer or praise, beggars cursing those who gave them nothing, ourselves amongst them, idols all vermillion, urinals all too prominent, and a clock tower with its clock fifteen minutes fast, and in the river itself, men and women bathing in a stream so strong and clear and blue that, if ever river could, it would wash away sin. No spot could once have been more lovable than this, with river, forest and hill in perfect harmony. Yet one came away wishing never to see it again.

But one thing delighted me. I caught sight of two long ledgers lying idly on a stall by the river’s edge. Remembering what I had been told a month ago on the road to Sangla<sup>1</sup> I went up to look at them, and their owner, a Panda Brahmin, at once appeared and confirmed my guess that they contained the genealogies of his client families. They were long and narrow like a bania’s account books, the paper was handmade—once from Sialkot, now from Muthura—and the Hindi writing was in ink produced by

<sup>1</sup> p. 77.

burning rapeseed oil, and so black and pure that entries 123 years old looked as fresh as yesterday's. There are, said the Brahmin, 2,500 Pandas in Hardwar. It is, in fact, the Heralds' College of northern India.

*Sunday, January 19—Tughalpur to Fauli—13 miles*

Sunday brings no change on this tour, and it requires frequent references to my pocket diary to know the day of the week. Never have I been so busy for so long. Since we landed I have not read a dozen pages and hardly written a letter not concerned with the tour. No end to those, and with no office or stenographer to help one, or orderly to post them, they have been a burden. Routes, too, have to be thought out with much poring over maps, and with no tents there must always be a rest-house available at the end of each day's march, and to be sure of accommodation for the three of us, one must book it at least a week or two ahead. Authority must also be informed, for without its help, hitherto most liberally given, progress would be difficult. Then every evening the day's doings have to be recorded, and that is rarely finished before eleven. A. and P. look after stable and truck, otherwise I should never get to bed at all! But the joy of the road never flags, and each day brings fresh knowledge, and sometimes a fresh experience.

This was the case today when, attended by a kanungo, we visited a Congress village (Gadwara) inhabited mainly by Hindu Jats. About forty of them gathered in front of us as we sat in the verandah of a house which belonged to one of the principal owners. He was a tall, lean man, with a Hindu's heavy moustache, but with the dignity and gravity of age, and with the fine lines of a life not ill spent. The talk lasted two hours, and at first the people were more curious than friendly, and there were some hard critical eyes fixed upon us. I mentioned that we had come from Peshawar and asked whether anyone knew where it was. An old Brahmin said he had been there with his regiment in the Great War. That provided a useful opening. In this war only one young man had enlisted, and when I asked why, I was given the unconvincing reply, 'Government did not ask.' The young man, it was said, was not

present ; but a little later, noticing one in a lilac shirt who was wearing a medal with a picture of Subhas Chandra Bose inscribed 'Nethaji', I asked him to come nearer so that I could put him a question or two. He stepped forward erect and grim and with shoulders squared in a way that spoke unmistakably of drill. Yet when I inquired whether he had been a soldier, he said no. But A., with her sharp ears, heard someone behind him murmur '*Azad Fauj*, the Free Army', which is what the I.N.A.<sup>1</sup> is called. He gave me a most hostile look, but more than once as we talked, all the bitterness of his face dissolved into the charming smile of unspoilt youth. It was, however, only too clear that his youth had been spoilt.

Another young man answered my questions with even bitterer face, and not once did he show his teeth in a smile. This was a police constable on leave. We came face to face because he was almost the only person who knew something about the administration. The old soldier actually carried the official hierarchy up to God himself—Governor, King, Parameshwar,<sup>2</sup> he named in quick succession. But when I asked whether anyone else had a hand in Government, there were whispered consultations and the constable at length mentioned 'Pantji', the U.P.'s Prime Minister,<sup>3</sup> and someone else after a pause, another Minister—Khidwai. When I pressed for more names, they said the local Congress Secretary must be sent for ; but he was away. A question as to who lived in Delhi produced the first mention of 'Punditji'—Pundit Jowahar Lal Nehru. This once more from the constable. Then they got finely muddled between Pantji and Punditji, until the constable said : 'Pantji sends things to Punditji, and Punditji sends things to *wilayat*—to England.' Throughout there was not even a hint of the Viceroy's existence. Of Congress someone said : 'Great is its work—no one else listens.' Yet when I asked if any Minister had been to the village, the answer was no. The same was the case with the Commissioner. 'And the Collector ?' 'Yes, he comes,' said a number of voices.

<sup>1</sup> Indian National Army, the army which fought with the Japanese against us.

<sup>2</sup> God.

<sup>3</sup> Pundit Govind Vallabh Pant.



The magic word *azadi* was then mentioned and at once faces lit up. 'What', I asked, 'will you do with your freedom when you get it which you can't do now?'

'When we are free,' said the young man in the lilac shirt, 'I shall be able to wear this medal.'

'But you are wearing it now,' I objected; 'and there's nothing to prevent you wearing a hundred of these medals if you like.'

'But what if you give the order that I must wear it no longer?'

Turning to the constable, I asked him why *he* wanted freedom.

'There will be no more restrictions,' he replied.

'What kind of restrictions?'

'Now,' said someone else, 'no one can have a gun without a licence. We are three villages and there is no one with a licence.'

'But why do you want guns?'

'To defend ourselves against dacoits; we were robbed three years ago.'

'And when your Honour comes to the village to shoot,' added a diplomatist in the front row with tiny gold rings in his ears, 'we can shoot with you.'

Attempting to maintain this lighter touch, I replied: 'When you are free, you will all have guns and I'll be too afraid to come amongst you!'

But this attempt at humour fell flat and the constable broke into an attack on the tobacco tax. 'When we are free,' he said, 'there will be no taxes.'

'Will there then be no more police?'

'No, we shall defend our freedom,' but the murmur of disapproval which greeted this remark made him admit there would still be police.

'Then will you still be paid Rs. 41 a month' (the pay he said he was drawing), 'or will you work for nothing?'

'I shall be paid—I am too poor to work for nothing.'

'But if there are no taxes, who will pay you?'

At this point he thought it prudent to disappear, and some less fanatical wiseacre said: 'There will be taxes but ordinary ones', while someone else exclaimed: 'The King

will help us,' a remark which was greeted with general approval.

This seemed a good moment to leave, but A. asked if she might put a few questions. Her first was—Would the women, too, be free ?

' Yes, yes, all will be free and equal.'

' Free not to bring you your *roti*—your midday meal ?'

This provoked a burst of laughter, and she then asked which they loved most, their mothers or their wives ? ' Our mothers, our mothers,' they all exclaimed. ' And how could it be otherwise,' said our host, ' our mothers from whose bellies we come, upon whose laps we make water, whose milk we have drunk, and in whose arms we have grown ?'

Her next question I put for her. ' There are great changes,' I said, ' and a new wind blows and the Sirkar's authority is less than it was. Is this also the case with the mother-in-law ?' Another titter of laughter, and while the front row were still meditating a reply, our host turned to A., and raising his forefinger, he said : ' In a year not all days are alike : there are good, there are bad. Some mothers-in-law cry to their daughters-in-law'—a savage shout showed what he meant ; ' then there are others who make them sit down and give them food.' After another question or two, A. said she had heard the views of the men, might she now hear the views of the women ? So off they took her to a house where later on I found her surrounded by a large crowd of women, with old and young glued together around her so closely that she almost wished she had been an untouchable.<sup>2</sup>

As I was walking round the village, a man appeared with a handful of old cloth and began tearing it to pieces to show how threadbare were his clothes. He was a little startled when I took off my collar to show him and those round me the hole I was only too familiar with at the back. I thought this might help them to realize how general is the shortage of cloth. But truth compelled me to add that our hardship was as nothing to those who have few if any old clothes to fall back upon.

<sup>1</sup> Government.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to A.'s diary for some of the things said at this meeting.

Walking on, we came to the house of a one-plough peasant, who owned only twelve or thirteen acres. Yet five years ago he had been able to spend Rs. 5,000 on building it. A good example of the prosperity brought to the cultivator by high prices. But how heedless some people are! Already the rafters of the living-room were black with smoke. No one had thought of putting the kitchen fireplace outside, though it could easily have been done for a few extra rupees, as in the case of most of the houses we saw in the Punjab. For the first time in my life I was asked to take off my shoes before entering. I gladly did so, as the floor was spotless, but I noticed that some of those who followed kept them on, though they were wearing country shoes, which can be slipped off in a moment. This, however, was an anti-British village, and good manners and racial politics don't always go together.

Another hint of this was what happened to David. As A. was going off to see the women, she heard a loud neigh from Goliath. For once his passion for his stablemate proved useful, for going along to see what was up, A. saw a young man trotting away on David. On hearing her shouts he slithered off, but when taxed before the village with what he had done, he coolly denied it.

Owing to our prolonged talk we did not get here till nearly two. We were welcomed by a Muslim revenue official, whose brother was murdered in the no-rent campaign of '33. He had jailed a tenant for not paying his rent, a matter of only 75 rupees. Later on, when they happened to be riding together and the brother was galloping in front, the tenant went for him from behind with his quarterstaff, and that was the end of him. The Sessions Judge condemned the tenant to death, but the High Court let him off—a not uncommon sequence. The revenue official belonged to the great race of toadies. He told me how on one occasion when he met a member of the Board of Revenue, he received him 'with great pomp and show'. He wanted to be made permanent in his office. I had great difficulty in persuading him that everything provided for us must be paid for. 'If you pay for things, how shall I be able to get supplies for officers in

future? No one then will give me anything unless I pay for it, and what shall I do then?' A difficulty, certainly, which every touring officer will appreciate and which in the Punjab has been solved by attaching to every rest-house of any importance a shopkeeper who, in return for a small monthly payment, is obliged to supply touring officers with their requirements.

He said that about 75 per cent of the Muslims in the district (Muzaffarnagar) were for the League—I was surprised it was not larger after all the claims made by the League. He himself did not want Pakistan, still less Hindustan. 'What, then, do you want?' 'That things should go on as they are.' 'Impossible: we have decided to leave India and we cannot go back on that.' 'But that', he said, as if talking to a fool he must respect, 'can be changed in a moment.'

The toady was followed by a parasite, a Muslim landowner, very dark in face but slim and delicate in figure. He, too, deplored our decision to leave, and when I suggested that he would have to adjust himself to Congress rule, he declared he would rather die than do that. He lived an odd but not uncommon kind of life, with no profession, riding neither horse nor bicycle, supporting the British Government and taking a distant interest in the farming of his land. To such men change cannot be very agreeable.

*January 20—Fauli to Salawa (Meerut District)—18 miles*

We had no one with us today, very different from the Punjab, where we often had five or six horsemen behind us. But this was to be expected in a province where we are unknown; where, too, a man on a horse is a singular figure. Undaunted, we rode boldly into a village of Hindu Gujars (Bawara), a little uncertain of our reception but trusting to the peasant's innate courtesy. And we were not disappointed. In spite of their obvious surprise, the two or three we met in the first lane at once took charge of our horses when we said we wanted to water them, and produced a string bedstead for us to sit on. Better still, A. was beckoned away by a lady to the headman's house, and off she went. The word went quickly round that something

unusual was afoot, and as the men gathered in front of P. and myself, we saw girls and matrons scurrying along the lane to the headman's house as eager as children who hear there's a Punch and Judy show round the corner.

My difficulty with the older men was that they spoke some dialect form of Hindi which was not always easy to follow, but we had a good talk all the same. The first remark to surprise me was that they had never seen their Muslim landlord, who lives across the Jumna in 'Karnaul',<sup>1</sup> as they pronounced it. He owns half the village but has never been there; and the same applies to a Hindu who owns a quarter of it and lives even nearer, in Muzaffarnagar, less than twenty miles away. As in China 1,100 years ago,

All their lives they have never come to see,  
But know their houses only from the bailiff's map!<sup>2</sup>

The only one who has 'come to see' is a Hindu shopkeeper who has bought the remaining quarter and lives in the neighbouring townlet of Khatauli. If this is typical, no wonder the Congress Government proposes to expropriate the landlord.

Though the village is so near Khatauli, it seems to have been almost entirely ignored by Government—no school, no Co-operative society, no panchayat, no visit, it was said, from any of the Development Departments, and when I asked whether the Collector had ever been there, the answer—I don't vouch for its truth—was: 'You are the Sarkar<sup>3</sup> and the first to visit us.' As to the administration, they knew patwari, kanungo, Tehsildar and Collector, but when I asked who came above them, they laughed as if to say—how should we know? All were blank except a bright-eyed young man of 22 who had read up to the eighth class. He rattled off—Commissioner, Governor, Viceroy, Wazir-i-Hind<sup>4</sup> and King. He knew the King's name, too, but there was no mention of the Ministers, and when I pointed this out, his excuse was: 'I left school in '39 and I don't know what has happened since.' And how could

<sup>1</sup> Karnal, a district in the S.E. Punjab.

<sup>2</sup> *The Grand Houses at Lo-Yang* by Po Chu-i. Trs. Arthur Waley.

<sup>3</sup> Government.

<sup>4</sup> Secretary of State.

he, since no one in the village, a small one, gets a newspaper? But when I searched his mind, he knew there was a 'Vizier' for the province, and he even mentioned Khidwai's name. He had also heard there was 'a big Council' in Delhi.

Change permeates everything in India today, but it is not in every village that it is at work or even desired. In this village, when I asked who came first in the village hierarchy, the answer was—the two Brahmin cultivators, and those present said they still touched their feet. The village representatives come next, then the Gujars, who are all occupancy tenants, and below them the village servants, with tanner and sweeper at the base and living on opposite edges of the village. The sweepers being the lowest in the social scale live farthest away, but at least they have open fields about them, and being fewer in number than the tanners, they have more space. The tanners were terribly congested, and their quarter looked like an array of dolls' houses neatly arranged with the narrowest of lanes between them and the smallest of open spaces in front for children and cattle.

Beggars whose tenements

Lie wall to wall, though they be tattered and poor,

Rough-used, despised and scorned, are yet in companies

And sociable clans conjoined.<sup>1</sup>

Their houses were at least as clean as those of their superior neighbours and adorned with the same animal and floral designs in white plaster. The Gujars said they no longer washed person or clothes when touched by an untouchable, but an untouchable can still not sit with them on the same durrie, and it was only with great difficulty that the Directors of the local Co-operative Cane society were induced to have a tanner as a director, though many of the cane-growers are tanners.

All this time—a full hour and a half—A. had been talking with the women, and when she finally emerged, she might have been a queen bee drawing after her a swarm of brightly coloured bees. 'May I take a photograph?' I asked. The men were too polite to say no, but their looks said it

<sup>1</sup> *Poverty* by Yang Hsiung. Trs. Arthur Waley.

plainly enough, and the women, says A., were explicit on the subject. Yet they were not in purdah, for they scanned P. and myself, notably P., with wide-open eyes. When we finally rode away and A. waved her hand to them, up shot a score of hands in the prettiest of farewells.

Purdah is as much a matter of tribe as of religion. A Naib-Tehsildar, a Hindu Rajput, who was with us yesterday, told us that his family observe it simply because he would lose caste if they didn't. When his wife goes out she wears a veil which covers the face 'to this place', and he pointed to the tip of his nose. But here, too, change is at work. In his mother's time it came a bit lower, and the veil was thicker. Now it is so thin that, when necessary, it has to be reinforced by a shawl—for how long? I wonder.

*January 21—Salawa to Meerut Circuit House—21 miles*

To the motorist all villages along the road look alike, but how different they are in reality, and how full of surprises. Today A. and I turned into one (Kulinjan) simply because it lay on the edge of the canal along which we were riding and I wanted to see whether it had any new houses to meet the increasing population. We stopped at the first gateway, through which I saw a lot of good-looking grey cattle standing in the courtyard. It was an opportunity to verify what the kanungo with us had just said about the price of the bullocks. He was right: a good bullock, said the young owner, now costs from 800 to 1,000 rupees. The owner proved to be a Muslim and a Baloch, whose ancestors had left Baluchistan 400 years ago in the days of Humayun,<sup>1</sup> for whom they fought against Sher Shah. There was a colony of them in the village and, seeing us talking, others gathered round. When asked whether he was for the League, the owner, who farms a hundred acres, said he was of no party, but he had voted for Congress because he wanted Hindu and Muslim to be one—the best of all reasons.

The word *azadi* had just been mentioned when a middle-aged little man in black lambskin cap, tweed coat, and shirt

<sup>1</sup> He succeeded Baber, his father, in 1530.

hanging loose over pyjama trousers appeared and at once took the lead in the conversation, and a most surprising lead.

'We are just hearing about *azadi*,' I said. Laughing loudly, he exclaimed: 'Yes, we all want *azadi* and we shall not be happy until we have turned all the English out.'

'How glad I am we have come to your village just in time.'

'No, no, we want you to go, but only as rulers; we want you to stay as brothers and equals to help us. We don't want to be under Russia. Russia is against religion. Two things a man needs: bread and religion. Russia gives men bread but not religion, and religion is the bigger need of the two. One day we hope to bring religion back to the Russians.'

He said he was for Congress.

'For the *garm dal* or the *narm dal*—the hot party or the soft?' I asked. The first is the Socialist party led by Jai Prakash Narain; the other, the orthodox party, led by Gandhi and Nehru.

'For the *garm dal*—the hot party,' he replied, almost bursting with laughter and showing two perfect rows of large white teeth.

'Are you then a Socialist?' He said he was. 'And as a landlord' (he owns a hundred acres or more) 'are you prepared to have all your land taken away?'

'Yes, yes. I think all men should be equal: owners, tenants and tanners—there should be no difference. All should live with love for each other, and there should be no difference between East and West. The whole world should be one family.'

'If you think like that, why don't you divide up your land now?' I asked, I fear a little mischievously.

'No, no; now we cannot; the Government Acts will not allow us to give our land except to those allowed to cultivate. First the whole of Hindustan must make an Akat (Act); then with great pleasure we will divide up everything equally.'

A. then took the subject into the zenana. 'When you get equality and freedom for men, do you want the same for women, too?'



‘Yes, yes; already they are treated with equality.’

‘Then you want daughter-in-law and mother-in-law to be equal?’

‘Yes, indeed.’

‘And husband and wife?’

‘We already treat them as equal.’

‘What if there is a difference of opinion between them?’

I asked.

‘They will settle it together; the wife looks after the home—she is the Home Department—and will decide those matters; the husband will decide all that is concerned with ploughing.’

The talk went on, point and counterpoint, and again and again, when a point took him by surprise, his whole face beamed with laughter, so generous and infectious that we all laughed nearly as loudly as he did. I wondered how he had come by his knowledge and his most unusual views and was amazed to find that his formal education had not gone beyond the local primary school. He had had the real education, the education a man gives himself. He had not only studied Persian and a little Arabic, but he was a reader and had collected a small library of his own, and when he heard that I had written a book or two and that they had been translated into Hindustani—I have somehow to explain my somewhat eccentric doings—he immediately whipped out paper and pencil and begged me to write down their titles, exclaiming: ‘Now you will write all about us and your visit to our village. What happiness for us.’

At one point A. inveighed against purdah. Though he wanted the same educational facilities for both boys and girls, with one curious reservation—the girls must not become engineers or doctors—he was in favour of purdah. ‘Nur Jahan’, he observed, ‘was Vizier of all Hindustan and shot tigers but she never gave up purdah. Man and woman meet in such a way that it is not possible for it to be otherwise. I have heard that in your London there are one thousand prostitutes—we do not wish our women to become like that!’

‘Yes, but we have many good women,’ said A., a little startled by such a home thrust.

‘ Yes, yes,’ he said quickly, fearing an unintended discourtesy, ‘ we know that many of your women are well-bred (*shareef*).’

‘ They are indeed,’ replied A., ‘ and I claim that our well-bred women are better than even your best who stay in purdah, since they continue well-bred without any protection from outside. They go everywhere, they brave everything, and they fear nothing.’ (Was this a little too patriotic ?) ‘ Their purity is real. I could travel anywhere without any covering to my face.’

‘ Yes, it is true, but our women are not like that, they should remain in purdah.’

There was an interval while we walked round the village. Idealism could not have sprung from more unpromising surroundings—almost every wall broken down, the plastering in shreds, and the children dirty. When we reached the large open space in front of his house, he begged us to let him prepare tea, and talk flowed again. A. asked him a favourite question of hers, ‘ Do men love their mothers or their wives most ? ’ His reply, spoken with great feeling, was worthy of him. ‘ Love is of different kinds : there is the love of the mother and the love of the wife—one cannot weigh one against the other. The love of the mother is of her from whom one came ; the love of the wife is of her who is one’s companion. There is, too, the love of the daughter : when one looks at that piece of one’s liver, eyes grow soft.’

Abdul Mabud Khan—so he is called—is the most endearing peasant we have met on this tour. It was a joy to watch his eager face and gestures and his laughing mouth and eyes. He was equally absorbed whether listening or speaking, and there was about him a glow of kindness which made one love the Indian peasant more than ever.

It was a long march, made all the longer by a misunderstanding about the rendezvous with the truck, which contained a meal and the horses’ midday feed. Coming to a village with a few shops including a confectioner’s, I bought a handful of laddu<sup>2</sup> and halwa,<sup>3</sup> the laddu for the

<sup>1</sup> I am again indebted to A.’s diary for some of the conversation.

<sup>2</sup> A golden ball made of lentil, sugar and ghi.

<sup>3</sup> A confection of sugar and carrot.

horses—they ate it greedily—the halwa for ourselves. While we were regaling, the inevitable crowd collected, amongst them a Hindu shopkeeper with a paper. ‘What’s the news?’ I asked. ‘We rarely see a paper.’

‘Nehru says we cannot have our freedom until the third party leaves the country.’

‘That means, I suppose, that you want me to go off.’

Much simple laughter at this simple jest and a chorus of noes. The people we meet in the U.P. are quick to laugh, and once they do this any constraint or reserve shown at first disappears at once, leaving nothing but friendliness followed by offers of hospitality. And any offer of money for the little but very useful services performed is invariably refused. Not once has it been accepted, whether for the grass given our horses or for the long time spent in holding them during our meetings. Yet the villages suggest poverty rather than wealth: walls are dilapidated, their plaster is peeling, thatches are old and sagging, and there are far fewer burnt brick houses than in the more prosperous parts of the Punjab. But—there are beautiful arches and carved doorways, and, thanks to more frequent rain, far more trees, the banyan and pipal often of the noblest proportions.

One more village we stopped at, to see one of the 2,150 tube wells which have been sunk in this tract under the inspiration of Sir William Stampe. The water came out of the well clear and sparkling and flowed away to the fields all sunlight. The superb crops around were the result. Yet there was no word of praise or thanks from the people for their benefactor, only complaints that they had not enough water in the hot weather and that one of the channels was leaking. Remembering the canal colonies in the Punjab, I was not surprised. It is not always the prosperous who are the most engaging. A characteristic difficulty in working so many wells is to secure honest dealing on the part of those who control the distribution of the precious water and the charges for it. A dozen operators have had to be sacked in the last eighteen months, and there are few, it seems, who are not corrupt. And how could it be otherwise when they get less than forty rupees a month? In giving its humbler servants so little extra

pay to meet the three to four hundred per cent rise in prices, Governments are literally inviting corruption.

We left Salawa a little before nine and so uneven was our cross-country road that we did not reach the cantonment until 3.30, and then it took another hour and a quarter to reach the Circuit House, as we walked to rest the horses, who were tired, with David stumbling ominously in spite of A.'s light weight.

## II—MEERUT TO DELHI

### *January 22—Meerut—Halt*

Yesterday a progressive land-owner, today a progressive village. Was it a coincidence that the owners were Hindu Jats who came originally from the Punjab, from Hissar? They still observe the excellent Hissar custom of keeping home and cattle in separate compounds. The women sleep at home with a man to guard them, and the others with the cattle. With its 300 houses Rajpura is not a small village, yet it could hardly have been cleaner. No doubt our visit was expected, but the lanes were wide and beautifully paved. The cost of the paving—6,000 rupees—was met by a contribution of twenty rupees from each house. There was also a fine building for the panchayat and boys' school, built this time with a levy of fifty rupees a plough, plus a thousand from those who don't use the plough and some small help from outside. Many gave labour and cartage free. This is the way, the only way, to transform the village. And one thing leads to another. The panchayat hall now has a small library—two shelves are sufficient to house it, but the register showed that it was appreciated. What a boon electric light would be in a village of this kind, and why shouldn't it be there with so much electric power at work on the tube wells? The peasant could then read in comfort at night instead of straining his eyes with oil lamp and deva.<sup>1</sup> Never have I appreciated electric light more than on the very few nights we have had it since Peshawar. Though there is a library, no newspaper is taken in. Village wisdom indeed!

<sup>1</sup> A small lighted wick lying in an earthenware saucer filled with vegetable oil.

The most striking thing in the building was a wall in the large schoolroom, which was adorned with six portraits divided by a pleasant impressionist landscape. To the left of the landscape, painted on the wall itself, were Suraj-ud-daulah<sup>1</sup> and Tippu Sahib,<sup>2</sup> and in between them Warren Hastings in a pink-lined mustard yellow coat, with a brown face, crooked nose and jet black hair looking like an old hair-net. His counterpart on the other side of the landscape was a gentleman with an enormous head, yellow face and rosebud nose and mouth. This was Lord Canning sandwiched in between Sir Seyyed Ahmed<sup>3</sup> and Ranjit Singh,<sup>4</sup> the last with a blue kirpan<sup>5</sup> and painted with a surprising delicacy of line and colour. The curious thing was that in this Hindu village there was not a single Hindu amongst the six. Another unconscious little village comment on the two-nation theory.

The school being on basic lines, the boys are taught as a matter of course to use their hands, but for the 126 of them there were only three teachers—the headmaster on Rs. 45 (£3 7s. 6d.) a month and his two assistants on Rs. 35 each, little more than a cooly's wage though supplemented no doubt by village bounty. I noted yesterday how little official salaries have risen compared with prices. One result is that Government service, the kind accessible to the peasant, is not so popular in the village as it used to be. 'There's more profit in our own work,' they said. The girls have their own school in charge of an intelligent and attractive-looking Brahmin widow, a woman of character and enterprise, for she not only teaches young and old but also runs a women's panchayat. But of that and much else A. is writing in her diary.

Perhaps the most modern feature of the village is that it has put school before temple. But though there is no temple, there are two Brahmin priests to prepare horoscopes and only 10 to 15 per cent of the people feel comfortable

<sup>1</sup> Nawab of Bengal and routed at Plassey in 1757.

<sup>2</sup> Ruler of Mysore and killed in the storming of Seringapatam in 1799.

<sup>3</sup> The founder of the Muslim College at Aligarh.

<sup>4</sup> The Sikh Ruler of the Punjab, who died in 1839.

<sup>5</sup> A dagger or short sword carried by the Sikhs.

without them. Like the village servants, the priests divide the village between them and receive as their wage a customary allowance of grain at each harvest and presents of cash at their clients' marriages. For a horoscope the charge is Re. 1/4 or some multiple of it, according to means. No one, not even the Assistant Registrar and Inspector, both of whom are Brahmins, could explain so odd a sum. 'It runs from of old,' it was said. Is it because it is divisible by five and five is a lucky number, linking up perhaps with the five-fingers so often painted on village doorways? Both priests cultivate as well as prognosticate. Gencalogies used to be kept by Bhats from Hissar, but they have not been round for five years, which looks like the snapping of an old link.

In so progressive a village it was not surprising to find that untouchability had disappeared. The Jats even claimed that about a year ago they declared themselves ready to take water from an untouchable. The old feeling now lingers only in the inner consciousness of the untouchable himself. I noticed, for example, a man sitting not on the durrie with everyone else, but just off it on the bare ground. 'Is he a tanner?' I asked. He was, but he was free, they said, to sit with them if he liked. Yet what servant sits freely with his master?

Being a sensible village they had got their holdings consolidated with the usual increase of income, put by the chairman of the panchayat at eight annas in the rupee. The cost, borne by Government, was only eighteen annas an acre. Another six annas an acre, provided by the cultivators, was spent on new roads, and now every field has access to a road.

The village has one of Stampe's tube wells and, as once before,<sup>1</sup> the chairman was frank enough to admit that the people are now better off. They eat more ghi, drink more milk, and wear better clothes. But marriage expenditure has gone up even more than prices—from 1,000 rupees ten years ago to 5,000. In a village of Muslim Sheikhs visited later in the morning, no one at our meeting would admit that they were better off for the high prices and their six

<sup>1</sup> p. 137.

tube wells ; but after the meeting, when no one else was by, the chairman of the local panchayat admitted a gain of two annas in the rupee. 'The Hindu Jats of Rajpura have one great advantage over the Sheikhs : their women are not in purdah and work in the fields. The Sheikhs will not even plough and so have to employ more labour—a costly business with wages fully up to prices.'

The Sheikhs' village was a large one with a bazaar and a population of three or four thousand. Villages of this size are rarely either clean or harmonious. People are more sophisticated and divide easily into parties. There was no sign of the latter at the meeting. They were all for the League. 'The League alone will secure our rights,' they said. But afterwards I was taken out into the fields beyond the village to see a tube well and, on turning to go back, suddenly found myself confronted by two large-headed Muslims with black beards so full and curly that I couldn't help thinking—what a place for a bird's nest. They fell in on either side of me like janissaries, one of them carrying a quarterstaff tipped with the Congress flag, and presented me with a petition in English, part of which ran as follows :

'We the residents of village beg to state that the present R.D. (Rural Development) Panchayat is an unrepresentative one and Mr —, the Sarpanch,<sup>2</sup> was appointed as such without the open majority consent of us. Utilizing his position he has also gained agencies of the sale of sugar and kerosene. He has used his post of Sarpanch and the agencies as a means of benefiting his partisans alone. One road was built in his mohalla (quarter) and two wells in a locality inhabited by his relatives and labourers.'

What the truth of the matter is I don't know, but it illustrates the dunghill side of village politics, and it almost certainly explained why I was taken to see a tube well beyond the village instead of one close to where we had left our truck. My janissaries, whose escort I could not throw off for some time, said this was done to prevent my returning to the bazaar, where they had expected to meet me with their petition. When they arrived, they were puffing like grampuses, showing that I had taken an unexpected

<sup>1</sup> Rs. 30 a month plus one meal a day (cost put at two annas a meal) and three maunds of grain at each harvest, in all about Rs. 38 a month.

<sup>2</sup> Chairman.

route. They begged me to turn aside to their quarter and then I would see how badly it had been neglected when the village was paved. But it was nearly two and we had left at nine, so back we went, bumping up and down over the lumps and ridges of one of Meerut's metalled but not very progressive roads.

Since we entered Hindustan, I have been wondering what is happening to caste in these rapidly moving days. A talk this afternoon with a Kashmiri Brahmin threw some light on this. We began with the Brahmin. As many social ceremonies cannot be performed without him, he is still respected, particularly by the poorer classes, but he is no longer regarded as 'a demi-god'. The Kashmiri Brahmins have only one restriction in regard to food—beef. This, of course, is taboo to every orthodox Hindu, and it is an important source of division between Hindu and Muslim, for Muslims not only eat beef, but prefer it to mutton, as it is cheaper. Whether one caste will inter-dine with another depends on the occasion. When it's a family affair like a marriage, caste prevails; otherwise there is no bar. But there are difficulties. The Hindu is cleaner than the Muslim, bathing daily, and not just once a week. 'Have you not noticed that Muslim kitchens are much dirtier than Hindu?' (Not all Muslims would endorse this, nor does it fit in with A.'s experience.)<sup>1</sup> My friend then related how his daughter, who is at a High School, once invited a Muslim girl to tea. The invitation caused a flutter at home. Grandmother said, 'We must borrow a china tea-set and not defile our own.' Mother said, 'No, we have a new tea-set which can be washed afterwards,' and daughter said, 'What's all the fuss about?'

All I hear and see suggests that in towns the educated of different castes now inter-dine freely. But what about intermarriage? I asked. 'Thirty years ago', replied the Brahmin, 'I heard of only one or two cases, but now they are very common. Some Jats have even married Muslim women. You can imagine how liberal they are. There are even cases of Englishmen marrying Indian ladies.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> I came upon this for the first time on the voyage home.



This last, however, is not 'considered respectable', nor is it 'regarded as very respectable' for a Brahmin to marry a non-Brahmin. In the village all new tendencies vary with the amount of education and are non-existent where there is none.

The Hindu's feeling about beef derives from his devotional attitude towards the cow, and it goes so deep that a riot can always be excited by slaughtering a cow in public. 'What do *you* feel about the cow?' I asked the Brahmin. 'I feel veneration. A mother sings to her child that the cow is the mother of her babe, and if you hear that as a child, it sinks in. She is also the mother of the motherless, since the motherless have to be nourished with her milk. Indians are the most sentimental people in the world.' The peasant also respects the bullock for the work it does for him. Only low-class people, said the Brahmin, will sell bullock or cow to a man who deals with the butcher, and then only out of sheer poverty. Better-class peasants would rather give their cattle away than do this, and so the public *gowschalas*<sup>1</sup> are as full as ever. Underlying all this is the fundamental Hindu doctrine of *ahimsa*, that life must not be taken. This explains the ubiquity of the monkey in Hindustan. They are everywhere, even in this compound. Remembering the village near Saharanpur,<sup>2</sup> I asked what people felt about them now. 'It is the same as with bullock and cow—only a difference of degree. When I was living in Muthura a monkey carried off my coat and watch. I took out a gun meaning to kill it, but my neighbours got excited and said they would pay me for my coat and watch rather than see a monkey shot. So I didn't shoot it.—Yes, I got back the coat, but it was all torn and the watch was broken.' Humans take a hand in this game and sometimes train monkeys to steal for them. The popular feeling for the monkey, which doesn't help to make the peasant any better off, derives from the *Ramayana*, which tells of the great help given Ram Chandra by Hanuman and his monkeys when Ram Chandra was engaged in recovering Sita. These feelings, said the Brahmin, who

<sup>1</sup> Almshouses for aged or infirm cattle.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 144-5.

knows the U.P. well, are 25 per cent stronger in the east of the province. The same applies to untouchability, of which we also talked.

My friend, who has over thirty years' Government service behind him, said that when he started, not a single person in the village could read or write. Now there are ten or twelve in most villages, and the result is, the peasants are less easily led : ' Formerly anyone could deceive them.' But they are more corrupt, for, thanks to the high prices, ' the cultivator can now offer any bribe '. In the old days, the petty official corrupted the villager ; now it is the other way round. The people who now exploit and corrupt him are ' the leaders ' with their promises of ' unlawful advantages '. In every village there is someone trying to set himself up as a leader by propaganda of one kind or another. Some of these are of ' a very wrong type ', and most of them have some personal interest. The village's greatest need today, he said, is good leaders. I could not agree more.

' What is the U.P. peasant's best quality ? ' was my last question. ' His hospitality.' The same has been said to me more than once of the Punjab peasant. It is a peasant virtue everywhere, and at its best in both Punjab and U.P. If our experience suggests a difference, it is that in the Punjab the offer of tea or milk comes towards the end of a visit, and in the U.P., at the beginning.

There have been many muttered fears of the future along our route, and more than once there has been talk of possible bloodshed inspired by the terrible happenings last year in Bengal and Bihar, and nearer home at Garhmuktesar in this district, just after we arrived in India. As so often happens when there is tension, the Garhmuktesar affair began with a trivial incident. Once a year Garhmuktesar draws an enormous crowd of pilgrims to bathe in the Ganges and visit the local fair. Amongst them last November came a Jat from Rohtak (in the Punjab) with his family. He took tickets for them to see one of the side-shows at the fair, but forgot to give them the tickets when they went in. An altercation followed with the showman, who was a Muslim, and when he tried to push them out, the Jat's wife slapped him on the face. This led to a melee

and to the massacre of every Muslim in the fair. The news spread to the villages round, and in one of the few where the Muslims were in a majority, they killed every Hindu man, woman and child. Reprisals followed elsewhere and before the madness could be controlled, terrible things had been done. About 600 dead bodies were recovered, all but forty the bodies of Muslims, but no one knows how many were not recovered, as there has been no inquiry. By a curious irony many of the Muslims were supporters of Congress. As in Bengal and Bihar, where the killings were on a much larger scale, the outbreak was accompanied by a fearful savagery, the kind that the uneducated peasant, however attractive in his saner moments, is liable to everywhere when the wild beast in him is awakened. And this, alas, was also the case in Hazara almost immediately after we left it. And with the administration disintegrating—it is the same tale in the U.P. as in the Punjab—who knows where it won't occur next ?

*January 23—Meerut to Niwari via Jani—17 miles*

The road to Jani was not the road of a civilized Government. The Government in this case is a District Board with a non-official chairman. Years ago I remember hearing Sir John Simon, as he was then, say that the Punjab had one big advantage over other provinces—namely, official chairmen for its District Boards, and this is still the case with most. This road—I had eight miles of it—was metalled, and there is nothing worse than a neglected metalled road. As with yesterday's road, lorries and buses, to get along at all, had often to abandon it for the bullock cart tracks on either side, and what a suffocating fog of dust rose from them as they passed !

Before reaching this so-called highway I had three miles through the heart of the city along roads as thronged and narrow as those of the Cantonment were empty and wide. The little square in front of the clock tower in the centre was gay with pyramids of oranges, but last November, said the Inspector with me, fifty people were killed there in a clash between Hindu and Muslim, and there followed stabbings of the kind that have produced almost a reign

of terror in many of India's cities. A professor known to the Inspector was suddenly set upon by a sweetmeat seller, from whom he was making a small purchase, and only escaped with his life, though not without injury, owing to his great strength. An onlooker actually told the Inspector he saw what happened but refused to report this, believing it would cost him his life. No wonder that the insurance premium against loss from civil disturbance has gone up, so a bank manager told me today, from half an anna per cent per annum to twelve annas per mensem.

*January 24—Niwari to Ghaziabad—17 miles*

Our horses, whom we have always put first, with our servants second and ourselves third—nothing disinterested about this—are causing us some anxiety. At Saharanpur, a Remount officer, as kind as he was knowledgeable, doctored Corydon's sore back and looked a little doubtfully at David's forelegs, and in both cases advised an increase of feed. Till then, on expert advice, they had all been getting 8 lb. a day and Goliath, the biggest of the three, was in the pink. But Corydon's back, never his best point with a high wither, is galled, and one of David's forelegs is a little dicky. Both now follow us at a walk and only Goliath can be ridden.

As it was a nice fresh morning I walked the first six miles, setting out with the sun just above the treetops. The air was full of pleasant sounds—ploughmen hailing each other across the fields, voices echoing from unseen villages, partridges calling in the brake, cranes cawing excitedly in the sky, axes at work on the trees along the canal, and the canal itself giving tiny gurgles as black-and-white kingfishers skimmed across it. Pleasant sights too—camels moving majestically with a gentle sway of long curving necks; villages half seen through trees and smoke; mist rising from village ponds, and as the sun rose higher, the mustard yellow of the rape glowing through the dark colonnades of the mango groves.

Coming to a village (Abupur) close to the canal, I mounted Goliath—no one could fail to look a little impressive on his back—and, followed by Corydon and David and their syces, I rode boldly in and asked the first person I met

where I could water the horses. He was leading me into the heart of the village when a rough voice said in English, 'What do you want?' When I told him, he took me to his well and, while I was struggling to prevent all three horses trying to drink together out of the one and only pail, he asked me what I was doing. I explained and inquired whether I might ask *him* a few questions. His interest was aroused and he took me into the courtyard of his cattle byre, near which we were standing. Wicker chairs were produced—these are now to be seen in most villages—and almost at once he offered me tea and the horses fodder. Not wishing to be a trouble I declined both, but it is a good example of what I wrote yesterday about U.P. hospitality. The offer was repeated more than once during my three-hour visit, and my continued refusal led him at last to ask whether it was a case of caste taboo!

It was a bit of luck falling in with him, for he had some education—he matriculated in 1928—and it is from the educated villager that one learns most. The only other matriculate in the village also joined us, a man with a sinister pock-marked face but a charming smile. The headman followed, as did a few others, not too many for friendly heart-to-heart talk. (This turned at first on conditions in the village, and once more I was surprised at the almost complete absence of facilities. With about 2,500 inhabitants, its only school is a primary school for boys. The nearest girls' school is five miles away, and the nearest veterinary hospital eleven miles. If anyone is ill, he can get treatment at a dispensary three miles away, but as only one day's medicine is given at a time, a patient who wants more has to go six miles a day for it—not the kind of thing one will do when it's hot or when one is ill. There is no Co-operative society, apart from the sugar-cane organization, which the people regard as a purely Government concern, and no one, it was said, has been to see them from the Agricultural Department. A veterinary dispensary was what they wanted most, and one can well understand this with the enormous prices now being paid for good bullocks. Every year there is cattle disease, yet no vet ever comes to inoculate their cattle. Standing by-

us in the courtyard was a pair of good-looking Harijana bullocks covered with beautiful blue-and-white quilted blankets, each with a sort of tea-cosy to keep hump as well as body warm. More canal water was their second need, and consolidation of holdings their third. If their fields were not so scattered, they could do, they said, with one-tenth of the watchmen at present employed. These are mostly boys who should be at school, but there are too many monkeys about for that.)

A great handicap to the owners is the observance of *purdah*—not a good custom, said the matriculates, but it is the wish of the women and the way of the village. In answer to a question by A., who had tracked me down, they said a mother enjoyed more respect than either wife or daughter. In other ways, too, the outlook is traditional: the untouchable's touch still pollutes, and at the other end of the scale the Brahmin is as much respected as ever. So, too, are cow and bullock, the cow not more for its milk than its manure, which is used not only for field and fuel, but also to clean the floors and strengthen the walls. None of the Hindus present had been to the temple this morning, but the Muslims all claimed to have said their prayers.

Four or five papers are taken in, and all of course wanted freedom, in order, they said, to get education, especially technical, so that they could make machinery. Like many others, they did not realize that they could make these things now if they wished, subject only to the controls. They attacked Congress for imposing these, and I had to defend it on the obvious ground that no country nowadays gets on without them. They did not approve of the Constituent Assembly's resolution of two days ago declaring that India should be a republic, but they may well have said this to please me. As to the educational system, it gave a man no advantage in farming: they themselves were unable to plough and had to employ labourers at a high wage.<sup>1</sup> Education made a man a good *shabbash-karnewala*<sup>2</sup> but not much else. For any work to be done by hand it was

<sup>1</sup> Rs. 30 a month plus one meal a day (cost put at 2 annas) and three maunds of gram at each harvest.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, the man who says 'bravo' while others work.

useless. (Hence the advantage of basic education which teaches a boy to work with his hands.)

Before leaving we walked round the village. One of the matriculates declared I was the first Englishman to do this, but an older man said an English Collector had visited them eighteen or nineteen years ago. The lanes were in a filthy state of mud and water, though there had been no rain for some months, and the fine architecture of the owners' houses was spoilt by dirt, disorder and smoke. Many houses had well-carved doors, and the larger ones small inner courtyards in a pleasant setting of pillar and arch. One mansion towered over the village, with all the vulgar ostentation of new wealth. Even before the war it had cost Rs. 60,000. The owner had only sixty acres, but—he lent money to his neighbours. A typical kulak, in fact.

As we were leaving, someone came up to me and asked who I was, explaining that he was the local Congress Secretary and must report about me to headquarters. The inquiry had almost a Gestapo sniff about it, but he left me when I told him that Nehru had been kind enough to bless my tour. There followed ten tedious miles alone on Goliath along a dusty metalled road under a hot sun. Walking is not one of Goliath's strong points, least of all when he is led. But first a carrot, then a banana held six inches from his nose, with the spur of an occasional bite, marvellously transformed him. I had one anxious moment as we approached Ghaziabad when he only saved himself (and me) from a fall after his large mouth had almost literally bitten the dust.

### *January 25—Ghaziabad to New Delhi—16 miles*

This morning at seven A. and I set out on the last lap to Delhi. Dawn had broken but the sun was not yet up, and the cold was sharp. Two hours later we reached the Jumna and the great iron bridge which spans it. It took us ten minutes to cross it. The river below, swift and clear at Tajewala, was now so muddy and sluggish that the garlands of marigolds which had been flung into it hardly stirred. Delhi itself lay hidden in mist that was almost fog, and all that showed was the wall of the Red Fort

crowned by a Moghul pavilion, grace itself, and a British barrack, square and stark. Passing under the wall, we entered ‘Delhi of great Moghul’, and, just before we did so, a car drove by bearing outside a large Congress flag garlanded with marigolds, and inside Delhi’s latest conqueror—Nehru himself. But the Union Jack still flies over the Red Fort, and one had only to look at the alert cocksure sentry guarding the great gate below to see how it got there.

Two months to the day since I rode out from Peshawar, and since then I have ridden or walked 795 miles. The Narbada is no longer just a dream, yet nearly 600 miles remain.





Part Two

DELHI TO JUBBULPORE



## Chapter VII

### DELHI TO AGRA

#### I—BACK INTO THE PUNJAB—THE GURGAON DISTRICT

*January 29—New Delhi to Gurgaon—18 miles*

After three busy days of refitting, planning and preparation I set out again today, this time alone—A. and P. are off to Rajputana for a week of sightseeing—and with one horse only instead of three. David and Goliath, after sterling service, have had to be returned: David, because he proves to have sprained both his forelegs, and Goliath, because his stumbling has become dangerous. David, whom we all love, went off on Monday, and Goliath on Tuesday. When led away, Goliath, true to form, became almost unmanageable. David's departure had upset him even more than it had us, and he thought that, if taken away too, he would never see him again. But when he saw him—they are once more stabled together—he gave a loud neigh of delight and was comforted. Now Corydon alone remains, and his back still makes one anxious. Two more horses are to catch us up at Agra, but over 160 miles have to be covered first. The Narbada retreats once more into the shadows.

A. walked with me the first mile or two and then, mounting Corydon, I rode on along one of the many dreary roads that lead out of Delhi. The country was first all ruins, then hills, and finally the great plain again, with yet another metalled road disintegrating. I liked the hills, but not the ruins, not even the Qutab, which I stopped to look at. Only the great arch there gives me pleasure, but alas for its sister arches, which have gone the way of so many fine buildings in this devastating climate. Today's climate was far from congenial, a strong westerly wind blowing full in my face the dust of India's dilapidated past. An Inspector from Rohtak accompanied me on a bicycle, and I heard much about conditions in his district; and still

more, about conditions in the Punjab as a whole, from an old and valued Indian colleague, who met me at the Qutab. All along the road we were constantly passed by men on bicycles either going into Delhi with their cans full of milk or returning with them empty. Enterprising and not too scrupulous villagers buy up the surplus milk of a village at fifteen rupees a maund, water it freely and sell it in Delhi at eighteen rupees. Co-operation is the remedy, as Lucknow and Madras have found, and in time it may be applied here. We asked a man we met what he had paid for the bullock he was driving home from market. Rs. 725 (£54), he said, a price in keeping with those given us in the U.P.

After toiling along the broken verges of the still more broken road in the hot sun, it was a relief to pass into the shade of the caressing neem trees<sup>1</sup> of Gurgaon and then into the cool clean house of the hospitable Deputy Commissioner and his wife, and to feel myself back in the Punjab. I was met on the border by the Assistant Registrar. He is the only person to have ridden with me on all three of my riding tours.

B., the English Deputy Commissioner, is one of the very few Indian Civilians I have met on this tour who are not deeply depressed by what they see going on around them. When I told him this, he said it was perhaps due to the extraordinary change in the atmosphere from a year ago, when so many mocked at Government and at the Englishman. I knew what he meant as I was in Delhi at the time, but he gave me an amusing example of the way it had changed. A year ago he received a letter from a local pillar of Congress which began: 'Dear Sir—Jai Hind'.<sup>2</sup> Some months later, when the Cabinet Delegation had done a good deal to clear the air, he received another letter from the same person, beginning this time: 'Dear Mr B.' and ending 'Jai Hind', and now, since the communal disturbances, his letters begin: 'My dear Mr B.', and contain no Jai Hind. The brutal doings at and around Garhmuktesar last November, of which I have already written,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Melia indica*.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, victory to India, i.e. long live India.

<sup>3</sup> p. 169.

nearly made the communal kettle boil over in the district. The Hindu Jats had only to hear a rumour that their fellow Jats on the edge of the district were being attacked by the Muslim Meos to move there by the thousand. The Hindus themselves put their number at 50,000. Fortunately, prompt action on the part of authority led to their peaceful dispersal.<sup>1</sup>

The arrest of the Punjab leaders of the League five days ago had a slight repercussion here today. Two representatives of the League, who felt obliged to 'testify', defied the orders forbidding demonstrations and had to be arrested. When brought before B., they were nonplussed when he refused to jail them, since it was clear they had 'demonstrated' only to save their credit at Lahore. 'If you release us,' they said, 'I suppose we shall have to do this again tomorrow.' 'No need,' said B., 'just tell Lahore that you demonstrated and were arrested.' And that settled the matter. A touch of comedy never does politics any harm.

### *January 30—Gurgaon to Jainpura—22 miles*

Today, I must admit, I felt my age. I got off early as usual but did not arrive till nearly two. The sun was hot and, though the wind was cold, it was behind us and there were miles of heavy sand below us, so heavy that I walked a good half of the way to save the gentle Corydon, whose fifteen years and slender ribbed figure do not lend themselves to rough or rapid riding. A bow with one frayed string must be delicately handled. We both drank deep on arrival—my first experience this year of a hot-weather thirst and a foretaste of what lies ahead.

Riding with me was a young Muslim of 25, a Rajput from the Ambala district, and an M.A., but with a wife who is only 'middle-pass'. He agreed that the difference was too great for companionship, but a woman, he said, will be the better mother for not being too educated. 'If she were B.A. she would not care for her children, not even

<sup>1</sup> The District has been less fortunate since; disturbances broke out in March, and since then there has been an intermittent war between Meo and Jat with much looting and burning (September 1947).

perhaps for her husband', a conviction forced on him by what he had observed in Lahore. His wife is in purdah by her own wish, 'but the only true purdah', he said, 'is the purdah of the mind. We must have free chance to look at women as they look at us.' He is, I think, the first Muslim we have met on this tour to express so modern and sensible a view. But like most Muslims, he was for Pakistan on the usual ground that only so could Muslims live their own life and not be dominated by the Hindu. The fear of domination is now an obsession and like all obsessions not amenable to discussion. Hindu nationalists should understand it as they have the same obsession about us. In the case of the Muslims it can now only be released by Pakistan, a conclusion I came to most reluctantly a year ago.

Soon after this talk I came upon an example of what it meant for a woman to be a Hindu before we came to India. There was a tiny whitewashed brick enclosure by the roadside, and I sat down on its low wall to make a few notes, only to learn that I was sitting on a memorial put up—no one knew when—to some poor woman who had committed suttee. As I was jotting things down, I was besieged by a score of boys on their way to school. They were all on foot, with two or three miles to do each way and with no hope of getting home again before five. Yet only two of them had brought any food with them; and all that they had had for breakfast was bread, ghi and milk. Another group of boys at Bhundsi, who were bound for the High School at Gurgaon five miles away, told me the same tale. Most of them were setting out on bicycles—125 bicycles in the village—but some of them were going the whole way there and back on foot. Only two had any food with them. Years ago I commented on the impossibility of getting a healthy growth of either mind or body under these conditions,<sup>1</sup> and in part they account for the very disappointing results of the Indian educational system. Later on as Financial Commissioner I pressed strongly for giving school-children a drop of milk in the middle of the day, and I was glad to find that this was being done at Mullana,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> p. 136.

but the milk was being given free, and in the village the free gift is not valued. Some charge, however small, should be made.<sup>1</sup>

During the six hours the young Muslim and I were on the way we made only one halt, to water our horses and see an Ahir village (Garhi Bazidpur). I have always wanted to see one, as Ahirs (whose ancestor, Hir, 'cherished snakes and fed them with milk'), are one of the few really thrifty tribes in the Punjab. They work like ants, but they have the contentiousness of strong individualists. This makes them bad co-operators, and here the village bank had failed and the members were making the recovery of their loans as difficult as possible. There was the usual chorus of assent when I asked whether they wanted *azadi*. 'The wild beasts are free, should we not be free too?' If only freedom doesn't make them like wild beasts! 'Now', they continued, 'there is *bandan*—bondage—and there is great difference between freedom and bondage. When we are free, if we sink a well, we shall not pay the well rate.'

'But freedom will mean more, not less taxation. Why, in free England Government takes nine out of every twenty rupees we earn.'

That surprised them, but undeterred they went on: 'Now we can't make guns and aeroplanes.' (The Red Shirts at Shewa said the same.<sup>3</sup>) 'We shall when we are free. Your means are better than ours: your food, clothing and income are all better. We can receive the punishment of death: you can't.' And so on. I had quite a lot to say in reply, and when I remarked, as one does in a village, that freedom was like a diamond of which great care must be taken, they nodded their heads and said to each other—'like a diamond'. Poor things—little do they know what they may be in for with a freedom for which so few are prepared. And who should have prepared them but ourselves?

The Ahirs' houses have the same charm of arched and pillared courtyards as the villages we saw in the U.P.; and

<sup>1</sup> A teacher for over thirty years in the East End of London, commenting on 'the really vast improvement that has taken place in the physique of the boys in the last 10 years', writes: 'There is but one reason for this—school dinners and milk'—*The Times*, 28 June 1947.

<sup>2</sup> *Jhansi Dt. Gaz.*, 1909, p. 90. --

<sup>3</sup> p. 15.



they were as dirty and disorderly. When I remarked, 'Is this all there is to show for Mr Brayne's teaching about cleanliness?' someone said: 'Cleanliness is only possible if a great ruler forces it with a stick.' The houses of the tanners were sadly congested, but they were cleaner than those of their masters. Untouchability is gradually weakening. For the last four or five years tanners have been allowed to draw water from the same well as the Ahirs, but they may not sit with those who own land on either bedstead or durrie.<sup>2</sup> This is also the case here, at Jainpura. The wretched sweeper fares worse and has still to wait until someone is kind enough to draw water for him. He has a well of his own in only one out of the local patwari's seven villages, and there only because a bania has generously sunk one for him. As we stood talking outside his quarters, a ragged starveling figure begged that a well might be sunk at Jainpura also. The headman said he would willingly pay half the cost—seven or eight hundred rupees—but who will pay the other half? The six or seven sweeper families earn a living as bare as their houses.

I had rashly announced my intention of visiting Jainpura in the evening, and as I entered one of its narrow lanes, a cloud of dust rose to greet me. All the sweeperesses were hard at work, bent double over their brooms. Here the disturbing element was not politics but economics. The Jats, who own the village, were bitter about the controls. 'They weigh us down with a stone,' said the headman. It was the old difficulty of getting sugar, cloth and oil, and he was surprised when I told him that this was not Congress's fault, as he supposed, but due to the war. Yet whose fault is it that this village had received no sugar for three months? They have had to buy gur at Rs. 22 a maund—two rupees higher than any price yet quoted to me. It is smuggled across the Jumna from the U.P., and the police, it is said, on both sides take a toll of four annas a maund.

The surprising thing about the village was that the Jats, though Hindus, shoot the monkeys that prey upon their fields—fifty or sixty already have fallen. One of them

<sup>1</sup> For Mr F. L. Brayne's campaign in this district see *Rusticus*, ch. v.

<sup>2</sup> cf. *Rusticus*, p. 135.

bared his thigh to show me a scar as big as an egg, the result of being pounced upon in the middle of a meal. The monkey is responsible for the village meeting-place being roofless. Bricks are not to be had owing to the lack of fuel, and a thatched roof would soon be pulled to pieces.

*January 31—Jainpura to Palwal—10 miles*

The 27th was Basant Panchami, the festival of Spring when yellow is the wear and kites are flown by young and old. But today was really the first day of Spring with a new soft tone in the early morning air. The Sikh Inspector with me quoted appropriately :

Ai rut Basant ki  
Mulia chadia bi  
Dhupan pargat hoian  
Gharan nun chalia si !

Hail to the season of Spring, the radish has cast its seed ;  
The sun has appeared, and the cold gone back to his house.

It was an agreeably short march, and most of it I did on foot to save Corydon for tomorrow's much longer march. The country round us was the same as yesterday, acres and acres of rape in the full glory of its yellow flowering with low hills always in sight, near or far.

The Indian road never fails to yield an interesting encounter. Today's was with an ex-sepoy bicycling to Palwal, where, after five years' military service, he is working with a motor company. He was a Muslim and the son of a Pir, who still ministers to his devotees with charms and spells, though, as with the Brahmin, his influence has declined by eight annas in the rupee. The son, who was quick and direct in his replies, said that he belonged to no party and that, if the English left, there would be great danger of civil war. The English, he added, ' have brought the country peace, but now there is much strife '. He was not at all the type of man to speak honeyed words, nor was there any reason why he should. The plain fact is, the massacres that followed the row at Garhmuktesar, less than eighty miles away, have profoundly alarmed the neighbourhood. When later on we were talking of the new demand for freedom, the plump zaildar riding with us remarked

cynically : ' It takes two years to get a dispute settled about two bighas, how long then will it take when the dispute is about eighteen lakhs of bighas ? ' Why he put India's area at this figure, I don't know.

More than once on this tour there has been a spontaneous reference to ' the good old days ' under ' the Great Queen '.<sup>1</sup> The Inspector with me was speaking of a Sikh State which marches with my old Sub-Division of Sirsa, where he lived, and was saying how much better conditions were in the Sub-Division—not ' the rule of loot and the police '. But, he added, people say how much better still conditions were under the Great Queen, when Government loans for seed and cattle were freely made and often remitted and there were more English and less bribery. ' That is the Indian's worst fault,' he said.

For how few in this country is prosperity a blessing. The Inspector said that it had made his fellow Sikhs in Sirsa more than ever addicted to opium and drink. And a Sikh Sub-Inspector from Ludhiana said that there, too, there had been a great increase in drinking amongst the Sikhs and with it an increase of crime. Recently two wrestlers, a Sikh and a Brahmin, had demanded hospitality as a right from a Sikh in his village. The Sikh said he would give it if asked for as a favour, otherwise not. This led to a fight, and the fight to his death. The Inspector told me of yet another murder in this murderous land, this time of an old friend, one of the zaildars I trusted most when Sub-Divisional Officer at Sirsa. A few months back he was set upon by enemies, and pitched on to a stack of millet and burnt alive. I was almost glad to hear that one of these savages had himself been murdered a little later in reprisal. The zaildar was a Bagri Jat, and in my time the Bagri Jats had a sinister reputation for dark and bloody crimes committed behind their high blank walls. They, too, are taking to drink.

This tale of murder led me to inquire again about poison.<sup>2</sup> ' Is it still used to settle a quarrel ? ' I asked the

<sup>1</sup> The pukka bigha is  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an acre.

<sup>2</sup> cf. p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 95.

men of Gugera, as we sat by one of their wells while Corydon was enjoying his ten o'clock feed. At first the answer was no. Then some memory returned to the zaildar, and he related how sixteen years ago a woman had poisoned her husband by mixing *kuchla* with some sweetmeat she gave him. An old man then recalled an incident of thirty years ago. A woman wishing to prosecute an intrigue in a neighbouring village, gave a concoction of dhatura<sup>1</sup> to her husband, and to his father and brother. The old man saved them by rushing off to Palwal for doctor and police. The Inspector said that poison was still freely used by the Sirsa Sikhs, who were a pretty wild lot in my time, and a Hindu Jat I met near Meerut said it was still used occasionally in his village, a large one.

A pipal tree was growing near where we were sitting. No tree is more revered. 'On each leaf are gods,'<sup>2</sup> and who dare tell a lie in their hearing? And in the shade below men gather to talk and smoke, and some even to sleep, for—and this was new to me—it is a protection against malaria. From the pipal tree we got on to *ahimsa*<sup>3</sup> and the sacredness of life. Were there any animals they would kill? Only snakes, mad dogs, and a poisonous lizard.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the Jats of Jainpura, though Jats themselves, they won't touch a monkey. One animal they love—the peacock, for its intelligence and beauty, and 'he tells us when the rain is coming: if it thunders a hundred kos<sup>5</sup> away, he hears it'.

The houses in Gugera were much the same as those we have seen all the way from Saharanpur, with the same beauty of arch, doorway and pillared court, but everything else about them in confusion and far from clean. It was therefore a surprise and a delight to find one as clean and ship-shape as anyone could wish. All there was to it was a passage entrance, with rows of dung cakes neatly piled on one side, leading to a tiny courtyard upon which the

<sup>1</sup> A 'deliriant narcotic'.

<sup>2</sup> See *Rusticus*, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> *Abimsa* forbids the taking of the life of any living creature.

<sup>4</sup> Probably the formidable *biscobra*.

<sup>5</sup> Here  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a kos = one mile.

one living-room opened. Seeing each thing in its place on shelf or peg, I exclaimed—what a wife the man must have! No, they said, his wife died a few months ago, and they pointed to the slender figure of a girl of thirteen standing shyly in the corner of the courtyard. It was she who had done all this, and Cinderella herself could not have looked more winningly. I asked who her father was and was shown a peasant with a careworn face, and when I said I sympathized (as indeed I could), his eyes shone with tears.

The stranger cannot be too careful in India of what he says by way of either praise or blame. I ought not to have praised the order and beauty of the house: that might bring it ill luck. I learnt this on inquiring the meaning of two swastikas which adorned the entrance to the living-room. They were put there to protect the house from the evil eye. The swastika is the most ancient of symbols, but it was with no ancient significance that it appeared in many houses in Palwal in '42 when the rumour spread that the Germans would soon be in India; some even had it on their clothes!

There was also a garland of dead leaves above the entrance, the relic of a *katha* or reading of the Ramayana by the local Brahmin priest to a gathering of twenty or thirty neighbours, followed by a feast. It was only the other day that I heard of the *katha* for the first time from a Brahmin Inspector who lives in a village fifty miles from a railway in the U.P. district of Etah. 'A man', he said, 'will die for show.' Instead of eating their ghi from day to day or giving the milk to their children, the owners, half of whom are Brahmins, will accumulate it until they have enough for a *katha*. The recitation of whatever sacred book is chosen—the Satt Narain is the popular one in his village—takes only fifteen or twenty minutes and is merely an excuse for the feast which follows. What they want—and who will dare cast a stone?—is that their neighbours should say—*Wah! Wah!* In Gugera, fifteen or twenty of the villagers had celebrated a *katha* in turn. This is the first Hindu village in which most of those present said they had been to the temple in the morning. The deeper we go into India, the more overshadowing is religion.

Though Gugera's houses, with this notable exception, had a shiftless look, its lanes were tolerably clean, due to the sweepers' allowance of bread per house having been doubled—a whole chapati instead of a half—and to the harvest allowance of grain having been raised from 'five-seven' seers a plough to twenty. This must, I think, be a survival of Mr Brayne's Gurgaon Experiment. Another partial survival is the manure-pit. I was assured that everyone in Gugera had one or more, but the two I saw did not suggest recent use. Yesterday's Ahirs were very critical of the progeny of the Hissar bulls, who were imported by the hundred as part of the Experiment. Of the cows they said that 'the treasury of their milk' was smaller than with the indigenous cow, and of the bullocks that they were much slower when raced at fair or marriage. The verdict here was more favourable, and the cattle are certainly finer than when I rode through the district eighteen years ago. On that occasion any mention of the Hissar bull produced a veritable tempest of protest.<sup>1</sup> Another change for the better is the general growing of vegetables, primarily, as is most right, for home consumption. But orchards are still a rare sight, and the only fruit that most people see is the guava, ber,<sup>2</sup> imli and mango, the last the only one to make a mouth water.

Palwal is noted for the two hospitals for men and women run by the Baptist Mission. I had talks with the heads of both, one of whom, Dr Medway, the head of the women's hospital, has been here fifteen years. I am always on the look-out for change and so I asked whether the men showed any more care for their wives. 'It would break your heart to see how little they care for them,' was the depressing reply. It is often 'a case of divided loyalties', mother-in-law and daughter-in-law pulling against each other, and in this area, when that happens, the mother-in-law always wins, for she is still supreme in the home; but an under-current has set in in favour of the daughter-in-law. In answer to another question I was told: 'There's nothing they don't talk to us about, but there is no talk of politics.'

<sup>1</sup> See *Rusticus*, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> *Zizyphus jujuba*.

‘Is it the same with birth-control?’

‘Many would like to stop having children: one the other day said it was her nineteenth confinement—and they ask us to operate to prevent them having any more.’ It was agreed that the conditions of childbirth were dreadful, and the best that can be said is that the women are used to it and expect nothing better. Palwal itself has six trained midwives, but there is hardly one in any of the villages.

Diseases of eye, ear and skin plague the men, due to malnutrition, said Dr Herbert, the head of the men’s hospital. With good harvests and high prices, there has been some improvement during the last two years. The difficulty is, the people have no idea how to use their money. ‘Give them 5,000 rupees’, said the Doctor, ‘and they will just throw it away.’ He thought it useless to give them more money until they learnt how to use it, which is what I have been preaching for years; and the Co-operative Thrift and Credit Society is the only way to teach them. Dr Herbert would put education as the first need of the village, even before hygiene, for the uneducated are quite unable to understand the importance of hygiene. The only people who have changed at all are the soldiers—this morning’s ex-sepoy is an example—but they don’t fit into the village and don’t want to live there. Incidentally, I have met far fewer soldiers since Delhi than elsewhere in the Punjab, but after the U.P., where there are even fewer, one hardly notices this. Yet there are said to be over 500 members of the I.N.A.<sup>1</sup> in the District. I have made many inquiries about them here and elsewhere. Their worst fault—to some their most conspicuous virtue—is that they are anti-British, but they are even more anti-Japanese. To me their best point is that they preach unity between Hindu and Muslim. They are naturally for Congress who, with doubtful wisdom, have backed them as if they were the army that had served India best.

*February 1—Palwal to Punuhana via Paosar—20 miles*

One star was still shining when I set out this morning. After yesterday’s touch of heat and with twenty miles to go

<sup>1</sup> The ‘Indian National Army’.

at almost a funeral pace, I thought it best to get on as far as I could before the sun gathered strength. After  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles along the Grand Trunk Road, which runs from Peshawar to Bombay, I turned on to an excellent unmetalled road on the bank of a small canal and was soon deep in the country with fields of wheat, cane and rape (still in flower) stretching away across the flat earth to an empty horizon. A landscape without form, but when the sun rose, each curling blade of wheat had a diamond tip, and peacocks strutted along the bank, their long supple necks glowing with the alchemy of a master hand. No humans were yet about, and the only sounds were of dove, partridge and crane.

For two hours I was alone, and as day after day passes with its endless questionings, solitude has its charm. In this case it was due to the Inspector and Sub-Inspector not having anticipated so early a start. In time they caught me up in the truck and got on to bicycles. Having worked in this District for six years, the S.I. knows the people well. Much less quarrelsome, he said, and much less well-off than the Sikhs of Ludhiana, where he belongs. But then they have much less spirit and don't work so hard. They put all they can on to their women while they sit and smoke the hookah. But they have one advantage over the more virile people of the north. They still have their old panchayats, with their greybeards settling disputes and even imposing fines; and if more than one village is involved, there will be a combined panchayat. Paosar, a Meo village, where we stopped to water Corydon and give him the nosebag of grain which I carry tied to my saddle, had a panchayat of the more doubtful new type. An old man said he had been fined three rupees for lopping the branch of another man's tree; and another that he had been made to pay forty rupees' hire to the owner of a trap (*rath*) standing behind us, which he had bespoken for a marriage but not used. We were getting on to a third case—this time for theft—when the headman murmured in a stage whisper, 'Don't tell the truth, don't give the village a bad name'. He was moving off in disgust when I explained that these cases showed how useful the panchayat



was in preventing people going to court, where they would certainly lie and waste their money and perhaps start new quarrels.

When we entered the village, there was the sound of drums proclaiming the birth of a firstborn son, and the feast which was to follow. Nothing of the kind when a girl is born, but otherwise, they said, no difference is made between the two. The Meos are the most important Muslim tribe in the District and spill over into the neighbouring States of Alwar and Bharatpur. As a community they are clanny and feckless, and the men of Paosar were no exception. The village had an air of neglect. The walls of the houses were crumbling, the plaster peeling, and the thatching recalled the U.P. The clothes of those round me were ragged and dirty; yet they washed them, they said, 'once a week—on Fridays'. 'Then why are they so dirty today?' today being Saturday. The only answer was a guilty laugh. And it was the same story with their prayers. 'We all pray five times a day'; but of the first five we questioned only two had said them in the morning. The only response to a question about freedom was a remark by one of the younger men, who said: 'Peasant-owners, if free, can never manage their affairs.' I can well believe it in this case, but it is not their fault: they have no school, no Co-operative society, and the nearest hospital for man or beast is at Hathin, seven miles away. The crops looked first-rate, but even here the character of the people came out. 'Why so much country cane?' I asked. 'Why not get Coimbatore seed from the Government Farm?' 'Two or three of us did that, but the others stole the cane to chew for its good juice.' Behaving, in fact, like the monkeys round them!

The monkeys were enjoying the spring sunshine as we rode on along the canal bank, some sun-bathing at full length like their kinsmen, but most picking out the lice from each other's fur. As we approached Panuhana, the hills of Alwar came into sight, a welcome hint that the plain we have been crossing for days is not interminable. This evening, being alone and at leisure, I felt the beauty of the sunset to the full. It was just an ordinary Indian

sunset, yet all was radiance and peace, and the great sea of yellow rape glowed with spring colour and light.

*February 2—Panuhana—Halt*

The cold 'has gone back to his house', and yesterday evening for the first time I had no fire and at night I slept in the verandah, tempted there by a half-moon sailing high among the stars. And today being Sunday I lay in bed watching the dawn and listening to the cooings of the doves, which overflowed when the sun rose.

From a distance all villages look alike, but what variety inside! Today's Meo village was quite different from yesterday's. The plaster on the walls was as smooth and clean as a well-groomed horse, and every house I entered had spotless mud-plastered floors with everything in order. Why there should be so much difference between two villages of the same community only five miles apart I cannot say. There was another difference: for the first time I saw a village with two-storeyed mud-brick houses, very small but with the charm of outside staircases and upper rooms open under their thatching to sun and wind. Their farming, too, was much superior: Coimbatore canes in place of local ones; the growing of vegetables spreading and adding variety and savour to diet, and two years ago someone had started growing potatoes. All keep poultry, and one man said with pride that he ate their eggs. There was mingled surprise and pity on hearing that when I left London, I was getting only one egg a month.

The president of the local village bank was wearing a fine orange tweed coat, and when people began to complain of the scarcity of cloth, I asked him: 'When did you get that?'

'Many years ago.'

'My coat, too, is old, older than yours,' and I pointed to the 1929 grey coat I was wearing.

'Then let us exchange,' he countered, to the general mirth.

Like yesterday's folk, they said they washed their clothes every Friday, but the clothes betrayed them and they admitted they did it only once, or at most twice a month.

The Vice-President of the bank mentioned the word which comes up sooner or later at every meeting—*azadi*. They were all for the League, but all that he could say of its objects was that it is carrying out the system ordained by 'our Prophet'. Jinnah was known to be its all-India leader, and a young member of the Civil Guard said that Noon was its leader in the Punjab. When I mentioned Gandhi's name, the president said drily, 'He is not yet dead', but admitted that Hindustan had been asleep and he had woken people up. He summed up the present situation pithily, with the remark: 'Gandhi says—I am lord of the country and power must be in our hands. Jinnah says the same. Only the ignorant quarrel: those with *akal*—understanding—don't quarrel: the country should be divided.' When I explained that the English had decided to leave, he added: 'If the English were to stay here a score of years, we should welcome them. We do not suffer from their raj: from Gandhi's raj there must be injury; Gandhi will grind the Muslims.' So says a Muslim.<sup>1</sup> But with the Hindu Jat, now that Sir Chhotu Ram<sup>2</sup> is dead, and with the untouchable tanner, Gandhi stands first in repute.

Though Punuhana with its Middle school is only a mile away and 75 were present, only ten claimed to be literate. The usual excuses followed: the boys have to herd the cattle and between them they earn a thousand rupees. 'Between how many?' I asked. Ten to fifteen, was the answer, yet there are 200 houses in the village. A greybeard came nearer the mark perhaps when he said: 'Education is to get service, but we don't get service: we have to work in the fields, and those who are educated can't do this well.' An unconscious tribute was paid to education later on when I asked about charms. They are much less worn, and another change mentioned was: 'We have given up earrings<sup>3</sup> and bangles.' 'Why?' I asked. 'Because of education.' The president then mentioned with pride that

<sup>1</sup> Events showed how wrong he was.

<sup>2</sup> A protagonist of the Punjab peasant and a member of the Unionist Government in the Punjab from 1937 until his death during the war.

<sup>3</sup> Compare the Midianites of 3,000 years ago: 'They had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites' (*Judges* viii. 24).

PLATE V



Crossing the Beas



A confiding hand (p. 100)

PLATE VI



Village interior (p. 193)



Abdul Mabud Khan (p. 161)



A village meeting (p. 228)

he had a son who was a B.A. and an Inspector of Police. 'He works with great honesty,' he said simply.

'I hear that the police are now more honest than they were.' (I have heard this from several sources.)

'I have not heard it,' said the president, sceptically. 'Only 5 per cent are honest.'

'What about the Civil Supplies Department?'

'They all loot: they loot both rich and poor.' And a chorus of assent went round the gathering, as has happened again and again on this tour. 'There is but one opinion on the subject.'

When I rose to go, I noticed, as they crowded round me, that all were wearing country shoes without the leather thong curling inwards at the tip so common farther north. 'This is the fashion here, 'but our shoes are strong shoes,' they said, 'too heavy for the banias, whose shoes are light'. They cost five rupees and last a year. 'Shoes like yours', said someone, pointing to my very old ones, 'would cost 22 rupees.' When I replied that in England they would now cost between sixty and seventy rupees,<sup>1</sup> someone remarked, with an outspokenness typical of the times: 'But you were paid 25,000 rupees when you were in service and took away much money with you.' I had a word to say about that which surprised them.

I asked the Naib-Tehsildar, who came to see me in the afternoon, whether there were any Communists in the District. 'One is waiting outside to see you,' he replied. This was a Meo, who at the age of sixteen was present at a village meeting I attended on my last visit here eighteen years ago, and he apparently wished to have another look at me. He was about twice the size of an ordinary Meo, and with his long black beard suggested the Sikh rather than the Muslim; so much so that not long ago, when he wanted to go from Delhi to Rohtak by road, he was refused a seat in the bus by the Muslims who controlled the service—so strong is communal feeling today—and it was only after waiting for two hours that he was vouched for as a Muslim by an acquaintance and given a ticket.

He is one of the very few Communists I have met with

<sup>1</sup> An overstatement, as I have since discovered.

the gentleness of the sensitive rather than the temper of the fanatic, and there was in his large rough face the sadness of those who have suffered. For years all but five out of his 32 acres were mortgaged and at one time, when famine prevailed, his family was so poor that his mother, who was a widow, went to a money-lender for a loan of ten pounds of grain and was refused. With the rise in prices he has been able, like thousands of other peasants, to redeem his land and he is now well enough off but says there are very many who are not. 'Neither Congress nor League does anything for them, and they cannot do things for themselves. The whole twenty-four hours they think only of this'—he pointed to his stomach—'and they cannot understand what goes on above them.' That is one reason why he is a Communist. Another is, he thinks that nothing will be done until Hindu and Muslim pull together. And yet another, that land should be cultivated in common if envy and hatred are to cease. 'When one man has more than another, how can there be anything but envy?' Like the Socialist land-owner we met in the U.P.,<sup>1</sup> he said he would gladly give up his land to be pooled and cultivated with other people's, and like many Meos, he wants the Mewat—the country of the Meos—cut away from the Punjab and made into a separate province. 'We should then live at peace with one another.'

My next visitor was a retired officer who also had come to see me eighteen years ago<sup>2</sup> and wanted to see me again. His theme was the sad one that he and his kind have served the British faithfully for generations and owe their whole position to them. Now the British are leaving them to the tender mercies of Congress and the League, who think only of their own supporters. 'What future have we?' he said bitterly. 'Why should I not give up my title'—he is a Khan Sahib—'like the members of the League?'<sup>3</sup> To this there was no answer that he could have understood.

<sup>1</sup> p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> See *Rusticus*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> They did this in July 1946 in protest at Congress being asked to form an interim government at Delhi.

Here I must touch on conversations I have had with three Sikh officials during the past week, one at Delhi and two since I left it. The one at Delhi knows the Punjab well and had little that was good to say about conditions there. The people were eager for change—for 'abrupt change'. They were more 'indisciplined' than before and 'everyone wants to have everything his own way'. The desire for freedom is largely the result of the elections, and they will 'get amazed' when they get it. The other two Sikhs were more local in their outlook. Both said that the situation in the District after the Garhmuktesar affair was touch-and-go, and one, an officer of great experience, added that, had the Deputy Commissioner been either a Hindu, a Sikh or a Muslim, it would have blown up. (This, of course, is primarily a question of personality, but in communal disturbance an Englishman has an obvious advantage.)

The other was a much younger man and with two good university degrees. As he clearly belonged to the younger generation, I was surprised to find him dead against handing over India to Congress and the League and in favour of the British staying here. That, no doubt, is because he is a Sikh, and the Sikhs are between the devil and the deep sea. 'Politically', he said, 'they are anti-Muslim, and socially anti-Hindu, and now they have been thrown into the pit.' This was an echo of the Sikhs' bitter feeling that their claims were ignored by the Cabinet Delegation last year. Apropos of Muslim and Sikh, an educated Muslim we met in the Northern Punjab said that the Sikhs were 'camouflaged Hindus', but he admitted that politically he would rather line up with the Sikh than the Hindu, and most land-owning Muslims would, I think, say the same, since both communities have a common economic interest in the land.<sup>1</sup>

I have not heard a good word for the administration as it is today in any of the three provinces I have been through. The younger Sikh was particularly depressing. Corruption, he said, had increased beyond all bounds and, though the Civil Supplies Department was the worst, all departments

<sup>1</sup> An interest, alas, since shattered by each community massacring the other.



were affected, including 'your department', meaning the Co-operative. 'So rapidly have things been going downhill that God alone can save us. Now please take this down, and one day you will find it come true.' He then dictated as follows: 'This Congress which says "For God's sake quit India" will one day say with folded hands "Please come and do justice for all of us."' 'Indians', he continued, 'are not capable of self-government at this stage; all key-posts should be in British hands and on their side they should work with the highest sense of spirit of justice as our brothers.' He assured me that this was not said to please, and if one may trust one's judgement after listening to Indians for over forty years, I think he was speaking from conviction.

As a Sikh who belonged to no party and only wished to be allowed to do his duty impartially, he said he was in a very difficult position. A non-party Muslim official I met some little time ago said the same: one must suffer in prospects or in conscience—in prospects, if there is no party to back one; in conscience, if one joins a party one doesn't believe in. Like other officials, high and low, the Sikh said his authority had declined greatly—only four annas in the rupee left of what he once had; and relations with the public were deteriorating, with people running more and more freely to the doors of those they had helped to put in office. Finally, he said that tension between Hindu and Muslim in the District was still acute.<sup>1</sup>

I fear this record is becoming increasingly gloomy, and yet I am always on the look-out for anything that can be put on the asset side of the account. Quite a number of things are there, but at present all are overshadowed by the clouds which hang so menacingly over northern India, most menacingly of all over 'poor Periwinkle', who has as much to do with their being there as with the clouds in the sky.

Rather too busy a day for the Sabbath, and, alas, my last in the Punjab.

<sup>1</sup> With tragic results, see note on p. 181.

## II—A JAT STATE

*February 3—Panuhana to Kaman—20 miles*

The zaildar told off to accompany me had not appeared when I left soon after 6.30, and he had some excuse as dawn was barely breaking. I had with me a Muslim Sub-Inspector with twenty-five years' service. Some years ago, as a B.A., LL.B., he felt entitled to approach the late Sir Chhotu Ram, the Jat Minister concerned, for promotion. He did this through a friend. 'If I promote him,' said Sir Chhotu, 'I get only two votes, yours and his. But if I promote a Jat, I get 200.' Democracy and Communalism do not go well together.

After five or six miles across a sea of rape, we came to a small broken red stone set in a field. This marked the boundary between the Jat State of Bharatpur<sup>1</sup> and the 'Angrezi',<sup>2</sup> as a yokel, showing us the way, remarked. I very soon became aware of the difference between the two, for I was left entirely to my own devices, not by any means matter for regret. Had I had a State official with me, I should probably not have heard what I did when I reached the first village, a large one of between two and three thousand inhabitants. Meos gathered round me at once, without any overture on my part, and poured out a cataract of complaints against the State: the export of grain forbidden; a heavy tax on the sale of cattle; much higher land revenue; crops eaten by the game, which is preserved; six months' imprisonment following the shooting of a deer; every official from the bottom upwards corrupt, the Maharaja alone not so, but he has not been to the village for eight years; no hospital for cattle within miles, and only a very small dispensary for humans; and, of course, no one had had any sugar or cloth. Being alone, I had no means of checking these allegations. Villagers often waylay one with a specific complaint, but this is the first time that they have spontaneously and openly inveighed against the administration, and what they said agreed generally with

<sup>1</sup> About twice the size of Luxembourg with a population of 575,000 (1941).

<sup>2</sup> The English.

what I had heard across the border. On the other hand, there is a good deal of political agitation going on in the State sponsored, if not engineered, by supporters of Congress, and doubtless this was an echo of it. I was followed out of the village by a young man with thick lips, fat cheeks, and evil eye, a Brahmin, who described himself as in the State C.I.D. For ten minutes he held forth on the perfections of the administration, and the way he did it almost convinced me that the allegations were just!

At the next village but one, where I stopped to water and feed Corydon, the people said at first that they were *sukhi*—happy—but when I remarked that was very different from what I had been told at the first village, they laughed and said they were *dukhi*—unhappy—and much the same complaints were made. A large black-bearded Meo, whom I met later on the road, also had nothing good to say—everyone corrupt, and most of the cloth and sugar going into the black market; things were very different in the days of ‘Butler Sahib’.<sup>1</sup> Will they be saying this kind of thing, I wondered, in other parts of India ten or twenty years hence? A mason I fell in with, pointing to his cotton plaid, said: ‘I bought this in “the black”: I couldn’t have got it otherwise.’ He inveighed against Congress. ‘Why, then, are you wearing a Gandhi cap?’ He laughed and said: ‘It is cheap’, costing eight or ten annas only (formerly four). As an example of the prevailing corruption I was told at the third village how some people who were taking grain across the border in their carts were held up by two policemen and allowed to pass on payment of Rs. 300, a type of tale that could easily be matched across the border. But the people were less well clothed—more rags and tatters in evidence. There was little difference in the cultivation—the same sea of yellow flower where the rape grew, but no cane even when we came to the shining rills of a well. One thing in the first village carried me back ten, if not twenty years. The fine houses there belonged to money-lenders—fifty or sixty of them, I was told. ‘We cannot build houses like that,’ a peasant said. ‘What interest do they charge?’ I asked. ‘Five per cent

<sup>1</sup> I have been unable to identify him.

a month.' 'Only 2 per cent,' interjected a passer-by. He proved to be one of the fifty and admitted that, if there was no confidence and the sum was small—twenty or thirty rupees—the charge might be five rupees a month. Bonds are taken only from doubtful clients; for others a thumb-mark in the account book suffices. No receipt is given when payments are made. Old-fashioned methods indeed, and still in force in Gurgaon when I toured there eighteen years ago, but now a thing of the past. No 'black bills' here and no Chhotu Ram to free the peasant from his bondage.<sup>1</sup>

It is not easy to teach an illiterate peasant anything, politics least of all. My black-bearded Meo said he was for the League, but when asked the difference between League and Congress, he said that Congress wanted Pakistan and the League was against it! 'And what thing is Pakistan?'

'How should I understand such things?'

At one village I came upon Brahmins preparing for a seven-day *katha*, the ceremony described above.<sup>2</sup> A large marquee had been put in front of the temple and the half-dozen Brahmins who were to provide orchestra and chorus had plastered their foreheads with the yellow and red symbols of their devotion to Shiva. They said that they had lost only four annas of the respect of the people, and grinned when I said that the remaining twelve should be enough for a living.

There is no better way of seeing country and people than to ride for miles, as I did today, along a village track or path, picking one's way across fields of rape and wheat; and, walking a lot as I do, it is easy to fall into talk with those following the same route, and the watering of a horse affords an excuse for entering a village. The man who affected me most was a rustic who had a bandaged hand black with blood poisoning, but unfortunately he was almost unintelligible, speaking some Hindi patois I couldn't follow. He inveighed against the power of money (*maya*)

<sup>1</sup> A number of Bills designed to protect the peasant against money-lender and trader were initiated just before the war by the late Sir Chhotu Ram.

<sup>2</sup> p. 188.

and sang as he walked, a song full of melancholy and yearning, and when I asked what his song was about, he pointed wistfully to the sky above him. The Indian peasant may have little to show for his religion, but he has a strong sense of Higher Authority and bows without question to its will. Throughout he addressed me as 'Baba',<sup>1</sup> while the mason called me 'Babuji'. I had never been called either before, and both were used with that endearing mixture of familiarity and respect peculiar to the peasant.

*February 4—Kaman to Deeg—14 miles*

'Babuji' was asked his age today by a set of merry Hindu Gujars who gathered round him when he watered Corydon at their well. Guess, I said. The first said, 50. No, no, said another—he is 70 or 80. This was less flattering and I turned to a third, who, striking the happy mean, said—60. I was then asked my caste, for they were completely mystified by my sudden appearance from nowhere. 'No, I am not a Hindu.' 'Then are you a Muslim?' I have never seen peasants in more 'skipping spirit'—one almost danced in front of me, and throughout our very disjointed talk there was peal after peal of laughter at my efforts to understand them. Basant—the Spring—had put them in rollicking mood. Yet they complained of many things: of the 25-rupee tax on the sale of cattle, a figure endorsed at the customs barrier close by; of the doubling of the land revenue on their land when they sank the well by which we were talking; of the lack of sugar and cloth, of course, and of the way the Congress agitation against the State was being handled. They were all for Congress, because it was for the people. They had just said this when a good-looking middle-aged man with refined features appeared and said in excellent Urdu that he was the headman. Later on, when we were walking away together to look at the village, he confessed he was not the headman but had said so 'as very few British officers come here'! He was evidently afraid of not being treated with sufficient respect. He followed up with another inexactitude, this time a rash one, saying, in answer to a

<sup>1</sup> Term of respect applied to an elder.

question, that the people were against Congress and entirely satisfied with things as they were. When he realized his mistake, he joined in the general criticism, and he did so with some effect as he had served in the army and had seen a good part of the Punjab. ‘There, there is water, and many canals; there are schools, too. Here in forty-five villages there is only one school; for us the nearest school is five miles away. How can our boys walk as far? That is why all these here are illiterate and cannot talk to Your Honour. But the State is small, and how can a small State do what a large province does?’ The illiterates stood around alternately laughing and brushing their teeth. This they did endlessly with neem twigs.

Speaking of their well they said that they had borrowed 400 rupees from a money-lender in Deeg and had paid him back 800. They all agreed, including the pseudo-headman, that the ordinary rate of interest is two pice a month in the rupee— $37\frac{1}{2}$  per cent—which is twice the common rate in the Punjab. When we got to the village a young man, who was standing at the gate of his house, said good-morning and I asked whether I could look inside. He made a sour face and shook his head. ‘Then of course I shall not go in.’ There were murmurs of protest from one or two of my young Gujar friends. ‘You’re no bloody good,’ he retorted, and almost spat at them. He then bade me enter. But I was disgusted and told him English was the language of a civilized people and he must not use it for abusing his neighbours. When I remember the citizen of Hereford who, thinking my car was going to run over him, called me ‘a bloody monkey’, I feel that perhaps I was more patriotic than just. Anyhow the crowd approved for, though they did not understand what the young man had said, his face and tone showed clearly enough that it was insulting abuse, which always rouses Indian wrath. After seeing two houses, both containing only a few possessions and showing little care, but with the kitchen fireplace in the courtyard outside, I tried to leave but was besieged by those around me with the most pressing offers of milk and they only allowed me to go when I said: ‘In my country there is plenty of it’ (not altogether true) ‘but in Hindustan

there is much too little ' (only too true), ' so what you would give me in your kindness, give it to your children.' The tiny incident is yet one more example of the overflowing hospitality of the Indian peasant.

There is a marked falling off in the appearance and breed of the cattle since I left the Punjab, much as we found on entering the U.P. There are fine-looking bullocks about, but most of them recall the cattle of Gurgaon as they were before Brayne's army of Hissar bulls started on their enlarging work. I have seen very little grazing, and everything except the crops is brown for want of rain.

Brownest of all were the hills, over which a very wide-eyed sun rose into a saffron sky soon after I set out this morning. I was once more alone and I still enjoy it. The mind, being at rest, is more receptive, the eye more observant, and one is at full leisure to talk to passers-by. I did this to a number of people, and all had a word of disgust about sugar and cloth, all except one. A thin old man walking into Deeg with his wife was showing me his ragged dhoti or loin cloth when an Adonis appeared on a bicycle. ' You at least have good clothes,' I said, pointing to the jersey he was wearing, and to the beautiful orange blanket tied on to his carrier. ' Are you by any chance in the police ? ' That was the explanation. He admitted he got regular supplies of sugar and cloth, but another old man I met, after declaring at first (as everyone does to a stranger) that all was well, said he had had no sugar since Bhaisakh (April-May). The people of Bharatpur are certainly not well clothed, less so than any I have seen on this tour. The women, who add a charm to road and field in this more Hindu India, nearly all have holes in shawl or skirt. But are they not partly to blame for this ? for I could see no trace of darns. Had they but seen my socks !

In his *Travels in France* Arthur Young writes again and again of the absence of ' circulation ' on the French roads. Here, too, there is very little—only a few buses and an occasional tonga and bullock cart, yet we are on the State's main highway. The buffalo has reappeared in harness with the bullock, which we have hardly seen since we crossed the Beas ; yet between the Beas and the Chenab he is even

more used for carts than the bullock. A driver who had come with empty kerosene oil tins from Agra said he had paid only 200 rupees a head for his pair as against 500 for a pair of bullocks. He, too, was critical of the State. 'Here there is bribery, in Agra not. Here things are dear, there they are cheap. Here there is a hartal<sup>1</sup> because of Congress, there there is none.'

Kaman, though sacred to Hindus for being in the country where Sri Krishna lived, was not much to look at—a long straggling townlet with a rest-house, round which jackals chased each other at night, howling like devils over the damned. But Deeg has the grand air, with an impressive fort, fine tanks, and gardens and palaces adorned with pavilions and countless fountains—not playing, alas. One pavilion, the very abode for some sleeping beauty, had 280 to weave enchantment round it. The water comes from a giant tank on a palace roof, which is filled from four wells, one at each corner below, and before the days of engine and pump, to fill it sixteen pairs of bullocks had to work day and night, in successive shifts, for fourteen days.<sup>2</sup>

On my way back from looking at these wonders, I stopped to watch some of the intelligentsia of Deeg playing volleyball and was invited by others looking on to join them. I then learnt something about the State. But my most interesting talk was with a doctor, who agreed that birth-control was the only way to keep the ever-growing population in check, and he told me of an ancient Indian device, which had at least the merit of simplicity and cheapness, the two essentials being mustard oil and cotton wool. There should be no difficulty about the former with the sea of rape around us, which grows ever wider.

*February 5—Deeg to Bharatpur—23 miles (to the rest-house)*

This morning I tried an even earlier start than usual, but it meant my calling my bearer, and not he me, at five. When I sallied forth at six, the moon, almost full, was

<sup>1</sup> A protest closing of shops.

<sup>2</sup> The tank is 135 feet long, over 100 wide, and nearly seven feet deep. When it is full, the palace roof has to support the weight of 94,770 cubic feet of water.—*Eastern Raj. States Gaz.*, p. 130.



sinking behind the trees and the only sounds, as I walked past the still sleeping city, were the bark of a dog from one house, the whirr of grindstones from another, and the clop clop of Corydon's hoofs behind me. I walked until it was light enough to trot, and in all  $12\frac{1}{2}$  out of the 23 miles.

There was even less 'circulation' than yesterday—only two buses, a few lorries and rather more carts, drawn by buffalo and bullock in almost equal numbers. At one point I fell in with a cartwright bicycling into Bharatpur to buy kikar wood<sup>1</sup> for his carts. He and his brother together can make a cart in  $1\frac{3}{4}$  months and sell it for between three and four hundred rupees against 125 before the war, a good example of how much more the peasant has to pay now when replacing old stock. He had never talked to an Englishman before and stuck to me for several miles before riding on. One man attracts another, and we were joined first by a sweeper and then by a wild and garrulous Jat, the first person I have seen walking shoeless. The sweeper was the best dressed of us four. Was he going to a wedding? I asked, and of course he was. The only interesting thing about the Jat was that he had never seen either Delhi or Agra.<sup>2</sup> All the others I have asked had seen Agra, and some Delhi as well. At the well where I stopped to water Corydon and have a snack myself, there was a Jat who had been to Faridkot with the Maharaja of Bharatpur. He had been many years in his service and his fine well-developed body and powerful limbs showed what a difference good and sufficient food will make. The others at the well were skinny but cheerful, and who would not be cheerful who has to do with water all day long? With the help of bullocks they were drawing the water up from the depths in a vast leather skin from which, when it reached the top, it poured in shining mass with the sound of a wave breaking on the shore.

Till then I had seen no wheat. 'Why don't you grow it?' I asked.

'That is as Bhagwan (God) ordains.'

<sup>1</sup> *Acacia arabica*.

<sup>2</sup> Delhi is less than 100, and Agra less than 50 miles away.

‘But it is your choice whether wheat should be sown, not Bhagwan’s.’

‘That may be, but it is He who gives the increase.’

Actually Bhagwan has a good deal to do with it, for this is a dry land and wheat needs more rain than rape and gram. Rape is everywhere, as if sown by a monomaniac. The reason is, not only is it a dry crop but its price has gone up from 5 to 25 rupees a maund.

I had to walk a mile and a half through Bharatpur’s central bazaar before reaching the ‘hotel’ where the traveller stays. The bazaar was nearly as clean as the one at Nabha, but there seemed precious little in the shops. The city has one notable event to its credit. In 1805 Lord Lake tried to storm it with its seven miles of walls, and his four vain attempts cost him 3,203 men in killed and wounded.<sup>1</sup> Outside the walls, pig and peacock waddled and strutted, each in his way a masterpiece of the Master’s hand.

Still no contact with the State, though the usual formalities were complied with before I entered it.

*February 6—Bharatpur to Fatehpur Sikri—14 miles*

Today, still alone, I took my way along an unmetalled road which in Moghul days must have been the highway from Agra to Bharatpur. It varied from the spaciousness of a highway to the narrowness of a cart track, but for a horse it was far pleasanter and better going than yesterday’s pot-holed metalled road, of which the truck had another bad taste today following the modern road to Agra. The first person I talked to proved to be a Subedar-Major of the State Forces and a Brahmin. He was walking along with his Brahmin servant, whose thick features and large discoloured teeth suggested the lowest rather than the highest caste. Great ha-ha-has of mocking laughter came bursting through the servant’s teeth when I said that the English were now going to give India freedom. ‘We are already free to worship Him above,’ he replied, and he pointed upwards with his hand. The Subedar-Major, who wore a fine tweed coat and looked a man of character, took a

<sup>1</sup> *E. Raj. States Gaz.*, p. 24.

more material view. 'When the Muslims ruled, they took our wives and our daughters. With you there is peace: a man can go with gold in his hands'—and he joined his hands together with open palms; 'there is no fear. You must not leave us.' Why this 'you must not leave us' from so many I meet? Is it *all* flattery?

I asked him my usual question: 'How many annas in the rupee are left of the respect paid to the Brahmin? Four annas? Eight annas?

'No, one anna only.'

I got a very different impression a mile or two on when I found the roadside littered with hundreds of earthenware saucers and large dead leaves, outside a small one-storeyed house festooned with strings of paper flags, the unmistakable signs of a *katha*.<sup>1</sup> Thirty-three years ago someone had built a shrine here for a holy man, and during the last ten days the present incumbent had been reciting the scriptures to all who cared to listen or wanted to take part in the feasting. Yesterday this had been on a great scale for the full moon. Directly they saw me, the Brahmins came out to welcome me, and insisted upon taking me inside the courtyard where, they said, 5,000 had been fed. Nine great cauldrons had been used for the *kir* (a preparation of milk and rice) and in an inner court was a pile of twenty-two empty kerosene oil tins. 'Why so much oil?' I asked. It wasn't oil, they said, but ghi—eighteen seers to each tin. And ghi now costs five rupees a seer! I was brought a pile of *puris*—thin girdle cakes fried in ghi—the top one almost hidden under another pile of precious sugar. With the pleasant insistence of village hospitality, they begged me to eat them, but were satisfied when I took a token mouthful or two—most appetizing—and explained my feeling about eating the villager's food in so poor a country as India. It is a pity perhaps that the ordinary sadhu does not feel the same scruple. Sixty to seventy of them (they said) had partaken of the feasting, and one was still sitting there in the traditional position with feet on thighs, his hair matted, his naked body smeared with ash, and his face dead with egoism. The *katha* explained the procession of burly

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 188 and 201.

black-bearded sadhus I had met earlier on the road, all with brutish faces, except one who, neither burly nor bearded, walked along alone, absorbed in his muttered mantras or hymns. A hard-faced Hindu Jat, whom I met later riding along on a small pony—one still sees a few travelling in this way—said he had shared in feast and *katha* and had presented the customary offering of one rupee. At this rate the Brahmins last night must have netted 5,000 rupees.

At the village at which I stopped to water and feed Corydon I fell into talk with four or five oilmen and butchers. One of the oilmen said that, though he now earned a rupee a day instead of four annas before the war, he was worse off. Before the war wheat was two rupees a maund, now it is thirteen, and fifteen or sixteen in 'the black'. In the black, too, a dhoti, which used to cost a rupee or so, now costs eight. As usual this was laid at Congress's door, and once more I had to explain. 'All want freedom now,' I continued; 'do you want it, too?' 'We have freedom,' one of them replied. 'Under your rule goat and tiger drink out of the same dish. Under Congress that will not be so'—very much what the Brahmin Subedar-Major, at the other end of the social scale, had said, and in both cases without the least prompting. Indeed, again and again I have had to defend or explain England's determination to give India freedom as soon as possible.

This village was still in Bharatpur, though only a tiny islet with the Agra District all round it, illustrating once more how interlocked are tribe, community and State in India's vast jigsaw set-up. A mile or two before I came to it I passed through the customs barrier where various charges are levied by Bharatpur on all exported animals.<sup>1</sup> Cows may not be exported, and to slaughter one may lead to six months' imprisonment, said a peasant two or three days ago.

Today's ride had a climax. I had still some miles to go when I sighted, on the crest of a long ridge, the domes and cupolas of Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's red sandstone city, which he built to outface time but deserted after barely sixteen

<sup>1</sup> Rs. 50 in the case of a she-buffalo, Rs. 5 for a bullock and two for a goat.

years.<sup>1</sup> There A. and P. rejoined me, full of their experiences in Rajputana. They were surprised and delighted at the improvement in Corydon, and they had some reason. Thanks to an increased ration (twelve pounds a day), the ministrations of two grooms and a grasscut, and my walking more than half the 150 miles from Delhi, he is no longer the 'lean sorry jackass of a horse' of three months ago, but once more worthy of the polo ground which years ago he adorned.

After tea we wandered about the spacious courts and colonnades and, as happened forty years ago, I felt oppressed by their death-like emptiness and the weight of their flat stone arches. But when later on we saw them under a full moon, death had turned to sleep, and in the aerial light pillar, arch and tower seemed rapt in dream.

*February 7—Fatehpur Sikri to Gohau—9 miles*

This morning, as the dawn shone through the cupolas on the hill above me, I set off to walk across the fields to the small village of Patsal, where I spent a couple of hours inspecting a 26-year-old thrift and credit society and talking to a large gathering of villagers. The society was doing well enough, lending to its members at only  $6\frac{1}{4}$  per cent, but the village was in a poor way owing to a dam built by Bharatpur, which robbed them of an important source of water for their crops. They bore the State no malice, and when I asked how things differed in State and District—we are now back in the United Provinces—the president of the society said very pertinently that the Collector was here only for two years or so and could take no permanent interest in them, whereas the Maharaja was always there and he was both king and landlord. But there were also disadvantages. Here, if owing to a bad harvest, land revenue could not be paid, it was suspended, but in the State it was summarily recovered. Here cases were decided quickly, but there they took months. Here, too, he might have added, there is a school only  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles away.

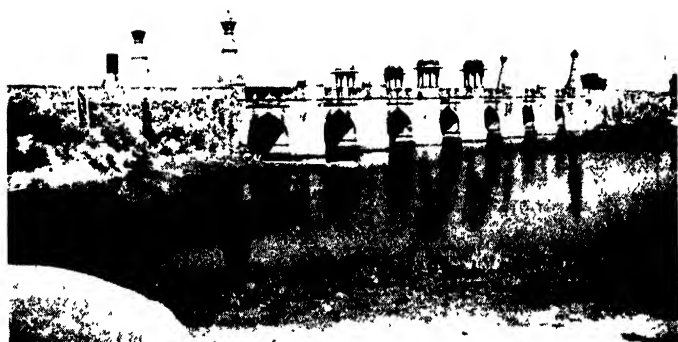
Squatting opposite me on a string bedstead was a man with a cruel little face. He was a cultivator—with only

<sup>1</sup> 1570 to 1586.

PLATE VII



A hospitable courtyard (p. 172)



Moghul bridge at Nurabad (p. 226)



A village potter

PLATE VIII



The sadhu (p. 289)



The marble rocks



Our last village (p. 291)

one plough—but also a money-lender. After saying at first that he charged only 12 per cent, he admitted he had three rates—37½, 75 and 150 per cent—according to the character of the borrower and the amount advanced. The highest rate was for small sums of twenty rupees or so. But how did he manage to become a money-lender with so little land? The answer was, he borrowed from the professional money-lender at 12 per cent. Another typical kulak.<sup>1</sup>

I asked why men went to the money-lender when his charges were so much higher than the society's, and got the usual answer. The Borah<sup>2</sup> (as he is called here) is always there, there are no formalities, and if he gets 500 rupees back out of a loan of 1,000 and can't get the rest, he impounds a bullock, cow or buffalo, and the debt is cancelled—an important point in judging his rates. Now, indeed, as everywhere else, the peasant is well enough off not to have to go so often to the money-lender. The money-lender, too, since the debt legislation of the '30s, is more careful in selecting his clients.

Since I entered Bharatpur State I have noticed again and again that people had their front teeth stopped with tiny squares of gold set in the middle of them. The money-lender and others had had this done, and amidst general laughter and with the shyness of the vain who are exposed, they said it was 'for beauty' and done by the goldsmith, who charged Re. 1/4 a tooth.

Amongst those sitting round me were two very young men, both cultivators, who were the local agents of Congress. 'What are your duties?' I asked. The answer was silence, until the Inspector with me exclaimed, 'Is Congress such a bad thing (*kharab chiz*) that you are silent?' One then said, blushing a little, that he told the cultivators that they and not the landlords were to have the land—'Karam ek ho—all should have equal fate,' interjected the president—and they were also to have freedom. 'Well now,' I said, 'here is a fine gathering, won't you take the opportunity and do a little propaganda for Congress?' But this suggestion made them shyer than ever, and someone said,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> The name of an important mercantile community of Muslims.



'They are newly enrolled and don't yet know much.' Yet they, and they alone, have been given permits for the distribution of rationed articles in the village. A very odd choice, I thought, comparing them with some of the others present, notably the president, whose position, as also his face, inspired trust. Out of the sixty or seventy present, only nine held up their hands when I inquired how many members of Congress were present. And only five or six, when I asked how many had never bought 'in the black'. 'The big people', they said, 'and those who live in the city get the cloth at the right rates.'

Judging by the answers to my questions about the administration, the stripling Congress agents have a good deal to teach the people, and also to learn. The Collector's existence was known, of course, and one person also named Commissioner and Viceroy, but no one mentioned either Governor or Ministers, until I named them myself. 'We don't know where he lives' was said of the Governor by a member of the society's committee; and of the Ministers all they had to say was that they had never seen one. One of the Congress agents knew that Mahatma Gandhi was Congress's leader, and when pressed, he also mentioned Nehru; but of Nehru's functions he knew only that 'he is sometimes in Delhi, sometimes in Calcutta, sometimes in Bombay'. I wondered whether information wasn't being purposely withheld, but the Inspector, a man of independent character, said no, that was all they knew.

Though no purdah is kept, and though the gathering was most friendly, I was not allowed to enter any house where women were present. Was this an excuse for not showing me houses which, from the outside, looked as dilapidated as any I have seen? But what can one expect of a village owned by landlords who do nothing whatever for their tenants? There are three of them, none of them of the cultivating class. Two are banias who live in Fatehpur, and the third is a Kayasth.<sup>1</sup> If they are expropriated, they will have only themselves to blame.

After tea I rode and walked the nine miles to this canal bungalow.

<sup>1</sup> A clerical caste.

*February 8—Gopau to Agra (Circuit House)—16 miles*

There is one feature of village life which is so universal that I have hardly mentioned it—the dung cakes. Whether plastered on the walls of the houses, or piled in rows along the flat roofs, or laid out on the ground to dry, or circling the village in pyramid or hive, they are rarely out of sight and one might suppose their multiplication to be the only object of village life. The loss to the land is most serious but unavoidable until some other kind of cheap fuel can take their place. Yet need they be used in the city as well? I passed donkey after donkey, each with three maunds on his back, jogging along towards Agra, and that is because wood there now costs three rupees a maund—about £6 a ton.

Dung cakes in the morning, the Taj in the evening, first at sunset, then by moonlight. When a man is well over sixty, it takes a good deal to make him catch his breath, but that is what happened when I suddenly saw it through the great entrance gate floating in the light of a large moon rising above the trees.

## Chapter VIII

### AGRA TO JHANSI—THREE INDIAN STATES

*February 10—Agra—Halt*

I should not have thought it possible to find a village of 2,000 inhabitants in British India without a recognized school. Yet that was what I found this morning when I drove out to Shahadra, four miles from Agra, and it explained why out of the seventy present at my meeting only four could read and write. Ten years ago, there was a District Board school; then, so the story goes, someone from a village five miles away was elected to the Board and got the school transferred to his village. The shopkeepers, for whom education is a necessity, have opened a private school, with a single schoolmaster on forty rupees a month—a little more than a cooly earns—to look after about fifty boys. ‘Ten-five’ go to school in Agra, but this needs a bicycle and it is not every boy who can afford one. The Inspector says the U.P. has many large villages like this. It seems much behind the Punjab in rural facilities. Shahadra has no panchayat, no post office, no dispensary for man or beast, no qualified doctor, and its only mark of attention from Government is the Co-operative society, which I had come out to see. But even this was almost a case of Government neglect. Its main object is to supply its ninety members with their requirements, yet it has not been given a permit for the distribution of cloth, and to get cloth members have to go to the tehsil headquarters twelve miles away.

Loud was the denunciation of Congress for the shortage of cloth, sugar and oil. ‘Yes, we voted for Congress, but there is no gain.’ Once more I had to explain that it was not the fault of Congress but the result of the war, though I had to add that there was this difference between my country and theirs, that in England rationed goods were on the whole fairly distributed and very little went into the black market. Here, they said, only 10 per cent of those

concerned worked honestly, and the only question debated amongst them was whether more or less than 50 per cent of the sugar and cloth went into ‘ the black ’. Some thought more, some less, and after discussion it was decided that at least half the cloth, and over half the sugar disappeared there. When we came to the subject of freedom and I said ‘ Haven’t you got freedom already ? ’, a voice from the back shouted out, ‘ *Khub*—perfect freedom ! We have neither sugar nor cloth and when we go for our rations, all we get is two kicks ! ’

I have often been told that the peasant is much better off in the Punjab than in the U.P. Wishing to test this, I asked what the people ate, and this is what I was told : nothing to eat or drink (except water) when they get up, and the first meal not till nine or ten. This is brought out to them in the fields, by their womenfolk, and consists of unleavened bread made of millet eaten with vegetables and pulse. Most have to buy their vegetables since, for want of water, less than 50 per cent grow them. Nothing more is eaten until the evening when the morning meal is more or less repeated. Ghi is taken only on feast days, except by those who have a cow or buffalo in milk. If ghi is bought, it is not pure ghi as in the old days, said one of the older men. All eat mangoes, guavas, bananas, water melons and ber in their season, and there was no one who had never eaten an orange. The most obvious lack in this not very adequate diet is milk. There lies the Punjabi’s greatest advantage, for there must be few who don’t get at least a drink of buttermilk every day, and there is much more milk to go round than in the U.P. The Inspector himself tells me that the only milk he can afford on his pay—about Rs. 110 a month—is half a pint a day, which goes, so to speak, into the family teapot.

When I asked how often they washed their clothes, I was given the stock answer of once a week ; but as before,<sup>1</sup> when pressed, they admitted it was only once or twice a month. No one confessed to more than one suit, except two or three of superior position, and it was said that this applied to those who had only one plough ; that is, to the majority.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 192 and 193.

I can well believe it, for the houses I saw of this class were on the smallest scale—one room only, with a little courtyard in front and a half-open byre close by for the cattle, and within, at most a couple of bedsteads with a minimum of bedding and possessions: in fact the kind of conditions in which the humblest tenants in the Punjab used to live before the war. Yet even so, if house and courtyard are well plastered and floors spotless and the few possessions neatly arranged, as in one of the houses I saw, there is beauty, and where there is beauty, poverty is at least without horror.

Today, to my relief, the two horses promised me at Delhi arrived from Saharanpur—Dumpling a grey, and Golden Morn a chestnut. Good luck to them.

*February 11—Agra to Jhajau—19 miles*

If anything could exceed the friendliness of the Punjab peasant it is the warmth of the welcome given us in the U.P. on going into a village unannounced. As usual we stopped at one on our way here. 'What is it called?' I asked.

'Sikandarpur.'

'Sikander was a great king. Do you know what he was king of?'

'He was king of all countries.'

'Where did he come from?'

'From Iran.'

'Through Iran, yes, but he came from Yunan. How long ago was that, do you think?'

'Five hundred years.'

In this simple way, and by virtue of Alexander's immemorial fame, was the ice broken between us. But that was not the end of our dip into history. I had asked my usual questions about the administration, and one of those who had gathered round us knew the King's name. He countered by asking me how many kings we had had. 'See now!' I said. 'You have answered all my questions, but the first question you ask me I can't answer.' This provoked peals of laughter, but as I have already noted, nothing is easier than to make U.P. peasants laugh. They were Hindus, Thakur Rajputs and so orthodox that they

keep no poultry, eat no eggs, and respect the Brahmin as much as ever.

My questioner was a Brahmin, and he had his daughter with him, a shy little girl who just about came up to his knee. She was curious about A., who I told them was my daughter. So her father said to her in the gentlest way, ‘As you are *my* daughter, so she is the Sahib’s daughter.’ He asked whether I was an American, taking me, it seemed, for a missionary. ‘He says *Ram, Ram*<sup>1</sup> and speaks Urdu,’ he explained to those standing round. In naming the official hierarchy, as usual no one mentioned the Ministers, and though Gandhi’s and Nehru’s names were known and Subhas Chandra Bose’s, Pant’s name<sup>2</sup> rang no bell in anyone’s mind. When I mentioned the coming to them of freedom, one person exclaimed: ‘We were free before, now we are tied (*tang*); we want your Government.’ And as we were coming away, A. heard someone remark, ‘In the days of Queen Victoria there was no lack of anything: then everyone was happy. That’s the kind of Government we want.’ ‘Enough, enough,’ said the Brahmin and others near, who apparently thought this was going too far. It was, of course, inspired by the almost unbearable controls, which have provoked anger and disgust all along our route, rising to a crescendo in the U.P. But what a name Queen Victoria has! This is the third time it has cropped up.<sup>3</sup>

As in yesterday’s village, the absence of an official school has led the people to start a private school, and amongst the boys are seven or eight girls. The nearest dispensary for man or beast is twelve miles away, and when they are ill all they can do in to consult a Vaid,<sup>4</sup> who, I imagine, has no diploma of any kind. This was the case with all but one of the half-dozen Vaidis practising in Shahadra.

Half the village saw us back to the road. This was the Grand Trunk Road to Bombay, and it now took us through a country which was all crops—wheat, gram and rape—

<sup>1</sup> A Hindu greeting, *Ram* meaning God.

<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister of the U.P.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 71 and 186.

<sup>4</sup> One who practises the Hindu Ayurvedic system of medicine.

interspersed with bush and tree and with an occasional orchard—something I have hardly seen since Delhi—but all as flat and featureless as the road stretching away in front of us; yet not quite featureless, for the bullocks drawing the great carts had collarets of bells round their necks. We are still on the great plain, but as we approached Jhajau, there was a gentle heave upwards.

This evening A. and I visited the village of Jhajau, the kernel of which is a spacious fortified serai built in the days of Aurungzeb. We sat and talked to a large gathering outside the great gate to the north. What started us was the sight of the Ramayana lying on a desk in the open and standing by it a Brahmin, who said he was going to read it aloud to those who cared to listen. It was as large as a family Bible, yet he had read it, so he claimed, from end to end in thirty days. Near him was an astrologer, who said he still plied his trade but made only one anna where once he made sixteen. I asked a one-plough man who had neither buffalo nor cow when he had last drunk milk, and he said not for four months; but a two-plough man, standing by him, who had a cow and two buffaloes, drank it every day. Unfortunately one-plough men predominate.

No one has stopped in this rest-house since January 1946.

### *February 12—Jhajau to Dholpur—15 miles*

Yesterday's heave in the plain was followed today by the wide rents of river beds and, at the end of our march, by the sight of hills ahead. We were now in the Dholpur State,<sup>1</sup> and very flourishing it looked. Innumerable wells were at work, and instead of scattered trees there were verdant groves, with the mango tree once more darkening the sunlit earth with shade and coolth; and, as we approached Dholpur, there were young plantations, protected from camel and goat by high earth embankments. Indeed, cultivation in the State, which we entered soon after leaving Jhajau, was as good as anything seen since Delhi. The road, too, was good, but carrying very little traffic (to our great advantage)—more lorries than buses, and only a few bullock carts.

<sup>1</sup> A little larger than Luxembourg, with a population of 287,000 (1941).

On our way we fell in with a village headman, who was walking into Dholpur shoes in hand, to prosecute a land suit. As far as Agra it was rare to see anyone walking along in this way, still rarer to see anyone shoeless, but now we see both. The suit had been pending for three years and he had already spent eight or nine hundred rupees on it, nearly as much as the 1,100 he paid for the land in dispute. Most of it had been spent on the petty officials of the Court—none on the Court itself. He could not explain why the suit was taking so long and, like the Co-operator near Fatehpur Sikri,<sup>1</sup> said that in Agra things went faster. But he paid an unconscious tribute to the State in saying he had no complaint to make about either sugar or cloth—almost a unique case! His cattle were asleep, he said, when he set out this morning on his fourteen-mile walk and, though a headman with two yoke of oxen and two buffaloes and a cow, he had eaten nothing. Would a headman in the Punjab set out on a long trudge without eating something first? His midday meal—four chapatis and some gur—he carried with him wrapped in his cotton plaid. He had been once to Delhi with a friend but ‘ran back’ to his village in fear for his cattle, as a mother in fear for her babes. When I mentioned the general desire for freedom, he said it was not freedom they wanted but *parvastī*—cherishing—and this, I believe, is what most of India’s 300 million peasants would say if they had the choice. But they have none.

Here, at the capital of this second Jat State, we have had the most hospitable reception. But Dumpling is suffering from a stoppage of the bladder, and he has only just arrived! ‘He’s mad that trusts in a horse’s health’.

*February 13—Dholpur to Morena—15 miles*

Thank Heaven! Dumpling’s crisis is past, but we had to defer marching until the afternoon. The silver lining to this small but ominous cloud was lunch with the Maharaja, which would otherwise have been impossible. It was indeed a golden lining, for we drove eighteen miles through a wild undulating jungle country to the Maharaja’s country

<sup>1</sup> p. 210.



seat, built 300 years ago by Shah Jehan on a wide lake that he might shoot and hunt in comfort. The stone was the deep red sandstone of Dholpur, the stone used nearly 300 years later for the Imperial Secretariat at Delhi, and there were the usual cupolas, colonnades and courts, breathing all the Moghul's love of dignity, order and space. Within now rules a man of 53, with bright eyes and the simple unaffected manner of the Jat, and speaking beautiful English. He started with a compliment. When I said we owed our good fortune in meeting him to the accident of a horse going sick, he said it was a case of *samskar*<sup>1</sup>—destiny.

He gave us a lunch of many courses, but had it been but bread and water, it would have been a feast for the talk we had. He naturally wondered what I was about, and that led us straight to the peasant, of whom he has every right to speak. He makes a point of regularly visiting his villages and listening to what the peasant has to say, with the result, as I hear from a good source outside the State, that he is revered by the people. He agreed that what the peasant wants most of all is *parvasti* rather than freedom, and by *parvasti* is meant the kind of cherishing a wife expects from her husband and a child from its mother. I asked him whether he thought the peasant had any feeling for the beauty of nature. He thought not, but was emphatic that he had a strong feeling for religion, though no doubt heavily alloyed with superstition. The kernel of this feeling was the belief in transmigration, which he took so much for granted that, when recently he wished to speak to a village boy who claimed to remember a former existence in detail, surprise was expressed in the village that he should think this remarkable. He did not think that India's spiritual development during the last thirty years had at all kept pace with her material development. When I asked him what he would put on the asset side of the account, he mentioned point after point on the debit side, and he would accept none of the suggestions I made to the contrary—not even that there had been an increase in people's self-respect. That, he said, was only an increase in self-regard. The so-called emancipation of women and their coming

<sup>1</sup> *Samskar* means fate or destiny as determined by the actions of the soul.

out of 'purdah' was a questionable advantage—many others we have met have thought the same—and he would not even agree that our manners had improved. Indeed, like so many others of his generation, he said that in the days of his youth British officers were more honest and straightforward and easier to make friends with. It was possible then to see people coming with tears in their eyes to bid a departing officer farewell, but not now.

As for his fellow Indians they, too, had deteriorated, no longer speaking the truth, or knowing how to treat uncles, parents, superiors and kings, or friends and equals, or even inferiors and children. He said that if a peasant involved in a case ever dared to say to a lawyer, 'That is not true, so how can I say it?' the lawyer would tell him that in that case he could no longer do anything for him. He was bitter about lawyers and said they were a curse, fogging justice and fomenting strife. Nor did he think that the intelligentsia of the towns had any real regard for the peasant. To him, as to me, the peasant is India's backbone and he must come first in all schemes of betterment, but no scheme which considers only his material needs will better him. He is, of course, in favour of education—how could such an educated man not be?—but, like most people one meets, he is very critical of the present system, which takes little account of the peasant's real needs. For this reason the State has its own text-books for primary schools, to teach children their history and their traditions. 'If the foundation is sound,' he declared, 'you can do what you like with them later.' He would educate girls as well as boys, but again on lines suited to their very different functions and duties. He deplored the spite of mothers-in-law and thought that if there was a change for the better, it was not very marked.

About politics, he was no more optimistic than anyone else we have met, and anticipated civil war. Of the leaders he said that Gandhi was no doubt a religious leader but he was also a politician, now indeed entirely one. Position and age naturally make His Highness a Conservative, but he was more than this—a Hindu rooted in India's Vedic past, which to him was the eternal present. Seeing my

interest in the subject, he very kindly presented me with a copy of a book he has just published on Hindu philosophy called *Eastern Light of Sanatan Culture*, and quoted what Sri Krishna said to Arjuna when Arjuna asked, how could he count upon Sri Krishna's advice in his future difficulties, seeing that Sri Krishna had the whole universe in his charge ? ' If ', said the sage, ' your interest is in the life of the plants, go to the pipal tree and I shall be there to help you. If your interest is in animal life, go to the tiger and I shall be there to help you. If your interest is in human beings, go to the King and I shall be there to help you.' The Maharaja takes a keen interest in animals as well as humans. Though a fine shot, he gave up shooting many years ago and now every afternoon feeds any animal that comes along—peacock, partridge, deer, jackal or wild pig—out of his own gentle hand. As to man's relationship with nature, he agreed that it should be one of harmony—of being ' in tune with ' her—rather than of mastery, an idea suggested by Aldous Huxley's latest book, *The Perennial Philosophy*, which I was reading this morning.

With all this talk the time passed far too quickly and we greatly regretted that our programme made it impossible for us to accept His Highness's invitation to show us a village.

The day ended in further anxiety, this time over the truck. A. and I set out to do the fifteen miles to Morena at 3.30, expecting the truck to follow close upon our heels. But on and on we went, the sun set, the stars came out, and the lights of Morena appeared, but no truck. We had had to cross the Chambal by a narrow pontoon bridge, and imagination said—that's where it has come to grief. We were now in Gwalior, a State the size of Eire,<sup>1</sup> and the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, who had come out to meet us in a car, most kindly took me back in it to see what had happened. A little after eight I saw headlights shining against the dark sky several miles away. Was it the truck ? It was. It, too, had had a stoppage: the petrol refused to go where it should, and it took four hours to persuade it.

<sup>1</sup> The population of the State is 4 millions (1941).

The crossing of the Chambal lifted us at last off the great plain and took us into a broken ghoulis country curiously like that where the plain starts nearly 600 miles to the north. On either side were 'immense pandemonia of ravines', set in hills 'naked, gloomy and ghastly', as Sleeman described them when he rode through them in December 1835. Rich crops in their fertile hollows made them a little less ghastly today, but the whole aspect is of a countryside visibly falling to pieces—like some other things! One thing is unchanged: the Chambal is still 'a beautiful clear stream', its water the coolest, palest jade. Across the bridge two horsemen, kindly sent by the State, were waiting to escort us to a village, where we were given the friendliest welcome though the people had been expecting us all day. Owing to the truck's ill behaviour, the last mile into Morena I did by car, but only my fifth mile to be done in this way since Gurdaspur.

*February 14—Morena to Nurabad—9 miles*

I spent most of the morning at the village of Jura Khurd talking to the Brahmins, Thakurs and Kachis who live there. The Brahmins enjoy as much respect as ever, and when Brahmin and Thakur sit on the same string bedstead, the Brahmin sits at the head. The only change I could discover in social custom, and that but a slight one, was in the attitude towards tanner and sweeper. Only a few now bathe when touched by them, but most still sprinkle themselves with water.

There are four temples in the village, but few go there for daily worship—this was not always so, they said. There is change, too, in the matter of pilgrimages. No one present could rival the fine old greybeard of seventy, who said he had walked to Jagannath on the Bay of Bengal and to Dwarka on the Arabian Sea and in both cases back again.<sup>1</sup>

'A true-devoted pilgrim is not weary  
To measure kingdoms with his feeble steps.'

He took 1½ months each way and did forty miles a day. There were questioning murmurs at this, but the old man

<sup>1</sup> As the crow flies Jagannath is about 700 miles away; by road it would be much longer. Dwarka is a little farther.

held to his claim, which I said would never be questioned in a Punjab village, where men thought nothing of walking this distance.<sup>1</sup> He backed it up by saying that he had walked to within five *kos*<sup>2</sup> of Agra—fifty miles away—in a day. As many as ten had been to Jagannath, but only the greybeard and one other had done the four great pilgrimages—to Jagannath in the east, to Dwarka in the west, to Badrinath in the north, and to the isle of Rameshwaram in the south. I could claim the first and the last. Few can go any distance today owing to the difficulties of food and transport, but many go by train to the Ganges 120 miles away, returning on foot with its holy water for their worship here. This they must carry back on their shoulders without setting it down day or night until they get home, and each takes it in turn to bear it while the others sleep or eat.

But this is nothing to what I was told seven years ago in a village in the Deccan.<sup>3</sup> There three men had recently 'rolled' the whole way to Pandharpur, a distance of 120 miles, and another three had got there by prostrating themselves the whole way. When I asked what exactly that meant, one of those present proceeded first to roll over and over on the ground, and then do a series of full-length prostrations, each starting where the last ended. Either way it takes about four months to get to Pandharpur, which means a rate of about a mile a day. The pilgrim marks the spot reached at the end of each day and, after a night's rest in the nearest village, starts from that point on the morrow.

After my recent experiences it was pleasant to find that the village with its 1,400 inhabitants had a primary school and two small village banks, with dispensaries for both man and beast within easy reach at Morena. There is also a Panchayat Board for twenty or thirty villages, with five members, representing Brahmins, Thakurs and Banias but none of the humbler castes. The Board is elected for three years and deals with small civil suits and minor criminal offences, with power to fine but not imprison. The people

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> In this tract a *kos* is about two miles.

<sup>3</sup> Near Ahmednagar.

find it useful and declared that the elections did not stir up party feeling. Very different from what I have heard elsewhere. Salaries are even lower than in British India. The patwari said he got only twenty rupees (including four for the rise in prices). The schoolmaster also gets less than the cooly, who even in the village is paid a rupee a day (four annas before the war), and in Morena Re. 1/4. One is reminded of Dominie Sampson, whose 'gains never equalled those of a skilful ploughman'.<sup>1</sup>

For the things they grow—gram, barley, millets and rape—prices are four to five times as high as before the war. They admitted that those who cultivate their land themselves and have not to marry a daughter—always a costly affair—were much better off than before, even though cattle are correspondingly up in price. A fine-looking bullock under three was produced. It had just been bought for 411 rupees as against the eighty to ninety it would have cost before the war. Similarly, a cow—not much to look at—was brought along, which had cost Rs. 175 as against forty before the war. The feeling for cow and bullock is as strong as ever and no one, they said, sells them when too old for work. Heads were gravely shaken at the bare mention of such a possibility. The story goes that bullock and cow, finding man's service more than they could bear, complained to God and begged Him to relieve them of the burden. He bade them appear before him on a certain date and called upon man to do the same and answer the charge against him. The peril was great, for how could man live without cattle? He was equal to the occasion. When the day came, he put garlands round their necks and tipped their horns with gold and decked them with so many signs of loving care that the complaint was dismissed at sight. And ever since, to mark the event, on the second day of Diwali, the 'garland of lights', their horns are painted and foreheads spotted with sanctified turmeric and special reverence is done to them.

Most of the cultivators have only one plough but keep a buffalo or cow in addition to a pair of bullocks. They have two good meals a day—bread, vegetables, pulse, ghi,

<sup>1</sup> *Guy Mannering*, ch. 2.

curds, and milk unless buffalo or cow is dry. Some of the Thakurs have a bit of dry bread when they get up, but most eat nothing until eleven or twelve. Very few eat meat. One sign of the greater prosperity is the larger number of goldsmiths in Morena, and they have much more to do than before, since many cultivators prefer to turn their spare cash into jewellery. Many, on the other hand, hoard it, said the patwari, who has been here sixteen years.

I have described this village at length, as I am told its standard of living is average, not as good as in the more prosperous parts of the State, but better than in the poorer. Walking through it, I was struck by the number of derelict or semi-derelict houses. I could not discover the reason for this, and nowhere do I see any sign of the house-building that the great increase in population during the last twenty-five years would seem to demand. I was shown only one new house, and it was of burnt brick, which reminds me that I have seen few houses of this type south of Ambala. I made no attempt to look inside any house, as Thakur and Brahmin keep their womenfolk in purdah, allowing them neither to work in the fields nor even take the men their midday meal.

The approach to Nurabad was most beautiful—a broad river (the Sankh) flowing between open fields and spanned by the finest stone bridge I have seen in India, dating from the days of Shah Jehan, and on the cliffs beyond it a stately red sandstone serai of the same age. I have now done my thousand miles, but it is still over 300 to the Narbada, and ‘the long road stretches on for ever’.

### *February 15—Nurabad to Gwalior—15 miles*

Approached by road from the north, Gwalior’s great rock fortress is almost as impressive as the approach to Gibraltar. Flat-topped and rising as abruptly, it looks like a giant aircraft carrier stranded on the plain. We stopped at a village only a few miles away, and for only the second time on this tour the people admitted that with the high prices they now eat more. The president of the local Co-operative society, a Brahmin, said that before the war 50 per cent—mostly tanners—had only one meal a day, but now all

have at least two. This is said to be typical of the whole district. If the people are still poor, it is because they keep neither poultry nor pigs—only low-caste Muslims keep the one and sweepers the other; they have no cottage industries, and they sell neither cow nor bullock when past work. The feeling for cow and bullock one must respect, but all feelings exact their price, and in this case the price is less milk. As to poultry, the defence was that Brahmin and Thakur are vegetarians and don't eat eggs, but what a market they might have with Gwalior at their door and eggs selling at  $2\frac{1}{2}$  annas each.

Thanks to Gandhi and to what the Brahmin called 'the air of the times', the many tanners in the village are now allowed to sit on the same durrie as Brahmin and Thakur and to use the same well, and by State decree—a decree that no foreign government could have made—all temples are open to them. The village represents the most progressive point reached in the State, and to that extent it is not typical. For instance, it is not in every school that touchable and untouchable sit side by side.

*Sunday, February 16—Gwalior—Halt*

What contrasts on this tour! Sometimes a single basin between the three of us, and now all the luxury that modern man can devise for the comfort of the body. In other words, we are the guests of the most hospitable of Princes and staying in one of his palatial guest-houses, with the radio—curse it, for it is on all day—concealed in a large toy motor car, and everywhere marble floors, and round us a garden full of roses and caressing neem trees. But, to me, once more, the greatest luxury is the mattress.

What a contrast, too, to the past. Writing of Gwalior over 100 years ago, Sleeman says never had he seen a place 'so hideously ugly or so hot and unhealthy'. Today he would only recognize it by its rock fortress. Thanks to an abundant water supply it is all trees, with many palaces and imposing public buildings set in well tended gardens. But unfortunately the communal virus has got into the capital and the local leaders of the *Mahasabha*<sup>1</sup> have had

<sup>1</sup> A society for the protection and furtherance of Hindu interests.



to be deported to some less frequented part of the State for stirring up the Hindus against the Muslims, who are only 7 per cent of the population. A prominent Hindu lawyer's funeral—he was injured in some communal clash but died some time later of meningitis—led to a demonstration by 5,000 Hindus, some of whom got out of hand and looted a number of Muslim shops, injuring over thirty Muslims. A situation of this kind is always full of dangerous possibilities, doubly so at the present time. The need for strong action was realized, and it was taken without hesitation.

*February 17—Gwalior to Makora—15 miles*

The Indian village is full of surprises. Today, in the heart of Central India, in a small village on the edge of wild-looking hill country, we met villagers who wanted India to become a republic. The explanation was the presence of the ubiquitous Punjabi, in this case a Brahmin landowner from near Gujranwala. With only a few acres to live on, he came all this way south, bought 600 acres of undeveloped land, and settled down on it with wife and family. Would any Brahmin of Central India have done the same contrariwise?

But this man had an unusual record, in itself characteristic of the Punjab. Born in Abbottabad, where his father was employed, he joined the Gurkhas as a clerk and in the first war served in both Persia and Russia and found himself at the end of the war in the mountains of Serbia. In the last war he joined up again, leaving wife and children to look after themselves and his 600 acres, and this time the war took him east—to Burma. He was naturally proud of having seen so many countries—all free, he said. 'Why, then, should Hindustan not be free?'

'How can we give you freedom if you kill each other?' I said challengingly.

This roused the headman—all present were Hindus—who exclaimed: 'You are the people who make us fight. The Hindus have no grudge against the Muslims, and the Muslims none against the Hindus. If we see Muslims dying, we will go to their help. But as long as Hindus are

begotten they won't allow Pakistan. 'The Muslims themselves were Hindus until Aurungzeb' converted them by force.'<sup>2</sup> I could not let the attack on us pass, an attack evidently inspired by a certain section of the press which is never tired of repeating the lie that we set Hindu and Muslim against each other. So I told them that England had only two objects: the first, to give India freedom as soon as possible; the second, to leave her in the hands of those who would be able to prevent men killing each other. 'However,' I said, 'it's your views I want to hear, not to give you mine.' Reassured, the headman related the story of a Muslim who had stabbed a Hindu in the capital, and who when caught confessed that Jinnah had paid him to do so! This, of course, I brushed aside as a bazaar rumour typical of the times. The Punjabi then joined in again—he spoke fluent English—and said very truly that the British were surrendering power and everyone was trying to get as much of it as he could. Then apropos of the two-nation theory, he added: 'We will bring you Muslims from a village only a few miles away, and they will tell you they have all our customs and eat as we do, and they even go into the temples and worship.' The last point surprised me, but others endorsed it, declaring that all Muslims had once been Hindus, and it was only through the oppression of the king, muttered the headman, that they had become Muslim. 'What king?' I asked. 'In the days of Aurungzeb, your Honour,' said the Punjabi.

Earlier he had said that the one advantage Gwalior had over the Punjab was, 'We have our own Hindu rule.' I was startled, therefore, at his answer to my next question, 'What kind of Government *do* you want?'

'A republic.'

'Do you mean there should be no king?'

'Yes, Government should be in the hands of the public.'

'But we have a King and are very happy with him, and yet we are free.'

'Very good, we will have a king as in England—no harm; but not a king who can do what he likes, as here.'

<sup>1</sup> Reigned from 1660 to 1707.

<sup>2</sup> When freedom came, Hindu and Muslim in this area started killing each other.

‘What will you do, then, with your Maharaja who cares for you now? Will you turn him out?’

‘No, no, Sahib,’ said a chorus of slightly shocked voices.

‘Then you don’t want a revolution?’

‘No,’ said the Punjabi; ‘a revolution is a very bad thing. I saw the Russian revolution at Tiflis and how the people struggled for the food we threw to them. Russians and Pathans, they are both the same.’

The headman was also in favour of a republic, and when I asked him what advantage he hoped to gain from freedom, he became eloquent: ‘In free countries all go in motors. When we are free, we shall have no care: we shall graze our cattle in the forest, take what wood we want’ (the forests round are ‘reserved’, and grazing and indiscriminate felling are forbidden), ‘and have more milk and vegetables. Now, if the Maharaja wishes to make us a kindness, the Resident may stop him. When we are free there will be no Resident.’ ‘Yes,’ said the Punjabi, ‘the Maharaja of Rewa gave his people responsible government and he was dethroned.’ The Maharaja has, I believe, been deposed, for what reason I don’t know, but obviously not because he gave his people responsible government, as this remark suggests.<sup>1</sup>

Before the Punjabi appeared on the scene, the people told me they ate three times a day, starting the day with bread and milk and otherwise enjoying much the same fare as the village near Morena.<sup>2</sup> Ten per cent, they said, occasionally eat meat. Not a bad diet, I thought, for the temperate climate in which they live, and they seemed well satisfied with it. But the Punjabi was very scornful. ‘When do these people ever eat wheat? And milk? Hah, they don’t know what milk is: their cows give only a quarter of a seer a day, while our very goats give us two seers.<sup>3</sup> The land, too, is better in the Punjab; here it is but poor stuff.’

‘Then why ever did you leave the Punjab?’ I asked, a question which made the others laugh.

<sup>1</sup> The Press Note published on 30 January 1946 shows that he was deposed for strikingly different reasons.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> A seer is about 2 lb.

‘The Punjab is no longer healthy for Hindus,’ was the unanswerable answer.

Yesterday at Gwalior I mentioned to two high and very intelligent officials of the State how I had been told that cows and bullocks were never sold, however old and useless they become. ‘You have been deceived,’ they said. That kind of remark always stings a little, so today I probed the matter further. It came out that fifty out of about 300 cows in the village were permanently dry and thirty out of 200 bullocks were too old for work. That cow and bullock may not be killed is, however, no guarantee of carc. When the hot weather comes, great droves of them are turned out into the blue unattended and only brought back when the monsoon sets the grass growing again. Meanwhile they fall a ready prey to tiger and panther, and also, when the monsoon breaks, to the rich feeding following the semi-starvation of the hot dry months before it comes. In a country where religion forbids the taking of animal life unless, like the snake and mad dog,<sup>1</sup> it is positively dangerous, it is curious to hear of strong searchlights being set up in the jungle to enable the privileged to see the way a tiger will approach and kill a tied-up goat or buffalo and teach his cubs to do the same. An official with us spoke with pride of the arrangement—‘to see the fun’, as he put it; and when I said it was in strange contrast to the Hindu’s veneration of the cow, he exclaimed: ‘But it is only a buffalo.’

Every village seems to want a different thing most, as well-meaning officials at headquarters are apt to forget in drawing up their office-proof plans. Here the primary need, said the people, was the repair of the outlet to their tank; and after that, a shop where they could get their fair share of the cloth that now goes to others. They declared that they had had no clothes at all at controlled prices for three years and had been compelled to buy everything they needed ‘in the black’ at twice the controlled price. Before the war they all had at least two suits, but now only one suit each.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Here a suit consists of dhoti (5 yards), kurta or shirt (3½ yards), turban (8 yards), and homespun shawl. Many expect a waistcoat as well.

That was not the only complaint against authority. The Punjabi said the tehsil officials would not let him pay his land revenue by money order, as he was entitled to do, but kept on billing him for the amount, without returning the sum sent by post, until he paid it in person and forked out the usual tips for prompt attention. Only a Punjabi could have had the guts to talk like this in the presence of the State officials with us. Afterwards, when we were walking back to our horses and were alone, he complained even more bitterly of the way his wife and family had been attacked and looted, and his wife injured, by dacoits when he was away on the Burma front. Before leaving I asked him : 'In your wanderings where have you found the people happiest ?' 'In Russia and in Greece,' he said, 'the sweepers on the roads wear old clothes for their work and when they have finished it they put on good clothes and sit with everyone else in the hotels. But how can people in Hindustan be happy when they are so poor ?' A pertinent question, but, as the canal colonies in the Punjab show, prosperity and contentment do not always go together.

In judging the present one must always bear in mind the past. According to Sleeman, the State in 1835 was 'a grinding military despotism' and had no police, 'and never will', he adds rashly. The hills, too, through which we rode today, and which he describes as 'naked, black and ugly', are now well covered with small trees and bush.

*February 18—Makora to Dabra—13 miles*

Water or its absence dominates the Indian landscape. Its power was vividly seen today when, after some miles of country with no growth of any kind but bush and scrub, we crested a low ridge and there, spread out before us, was a sea of wheat, the green shimmering in the sunlight with the first golden hint of ripening grain. I was assured by the people of Ramgarh, where I spent most of the morning, that in the bare tract no cultivation was possible owing to the thinness of the top soil—a few inches only, it was said. Yet later on, when I met the Dutch Manager of the local sugar factory, he said this was nonsense and that, with the help of a tractor to clear away the jungle, much of

the land could be cultivated, as he had found with most of the 2,600 acres he was farming. But the energy was lacking. Also the tractor, he might have added.

At Ramgarh I was making rather languid inquiries (after not too good a night), feeling that it had nothing fresh to show me, when suddenly, and almost accidentally, I came upon an example of Co-operative farming—on the tiniest scale no doubt, but a sign of what might be done on the scale that India needs. Four peasants whose land adjoined a well had joined together to cultivate about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  acres of cane. Each contributes twenty rupees for seed, and when labour is wanted—for instance, for earthing and harvesting, and for repairing the mud walls which protect the cane—each contributes an equal number of labourers, either from his own family or by hiring them. The same principle is followed with manure and transport, so no accounts are necessary. There was another case of this in the village, covering nearly two acres, and twenty more in Dabra, all cases of cane-cultivation which requires much labour, and owing to the factory hired labour is costly and not easy to get.

The factory has been running for five years and has produced great changes in the neighbourhood, but none to their advantage, said the people of Ramgarh. Many—twenty in Ramgarh alone—have lost part of their land, which was acquired compulsorily for one of the factory's three farms. No doubt they were paid a good price for it, but what is money to the peasant compared with land? And how dangerous to put a large sum into his hands if he is illiterate! No one was given land in exchange, and one of the victims said that with only three acres left he now has to earn his living as a cooly. Some were offered permanent employment in the factory as compensation, but no one accepted the offer. And I don't blame them, for what an exchange after being their own masters and working 'in tune' with nature, to work as servants and out of tune with machinery!

Yet surely, I said, there must be some advantage from the factory? Yes, they grow more cane now—four times as much, said the patwari—but they get none of its sugar,

and they may convert only 25 per cent of it into gur, and that only with a permit which has to be obtained from the tehsil, doubtless with the usual delays and petty exactions. If they want more gur, they must pay twenty rupees a maund for it in 'the black'. One more example of the control system, which in the village at least seems to go all awry. Last year the factory, which is a private affair, was allowed to give them a quota of sugar, but this year the concession has been withdrawn.<sup>1</sup> There is the monthly ration of half a pound of sugar a family, which everyone is supposed to get, but they said they had had neither sugar nor cloth for two months. Also is it right, they asked, to give a small family the same amount as a large? The Tehsildar, who appeared in the course of our talk, said the villager could get sugar only for a marriage, and for this there were three rates—five, ten and fifteen seers. 'Who gets fifteen?' I asked. 'A first-class gentleman,' was the reply. He was a little embarrassed when I asked him what was the difference between a first-class and a second-class gentleman, and said that a line was drawn between peasant and untouchable; also between boy and girl when they were married. For once the daughter scores, getting, if of peasant stock, fifteen seers instead of ten; and if an untouchable, ten seers instead of five.

A little before I had been assured that the old distinctions between touchable and untouchable no longer existed. But here was a new one slipping in in their place. Some scraps, too, of the old remain. When, for example, I asked about temple entry, I was assured that there was no bar, but a voice in the crowd questioned this and a lively discussion followed, which disclosed the fact that, while the cultivators could enter the innermost recess and garland the god's image, this was forbidden to the tanner. Someone, thinking that change was going too far, exclaimed: 'If they give up skinning our cattle, who will do this?' A very practical question, but sensibly answered by someone saying, 'There is no reason why they should not do this as long as

<sup>1</sup> Restored the following day by wire from Gwalior as an inducement to the cultivators to bring the cane they were withholding to the factory, which was in danger of closure for want of sufficient supplies.

they wash their hands afterwards'. The wretched sweeper is still treated in the old style, and if anyone is touched by him, he must wash his clothes and bathe. But there again there's a reason—he handles night-soil.

There are school and dispensary within two miles, but no veterinary hospital within ten miles. There is one bicycle in the village, bought by the owner to take his boy to school.

In the evening we were raced round the factory's 600-acre farm here by its dynamic manager and shown a field of Coimbatore cane (No. 421), which this year has produced 1,100 maunds to the acre against an average of 400.

*February 19—Dabra to Kotra in Datia State—7 miles*

The fertility of the factory's three farms and of the country round—80,000 acres in all—depends upon a system of small canals fed from a vast lake created by the Harsi dam. The manager took us there this afternoon in his weapon carrier, a conveyance which for mobility and smoothness, and power to tackle the seemingly impossible, puts the jeep into the shade. The Harsi lake is a large and beautiful stretch of water, and the dam that holds it up must be at least three-quarters of a mile long. It was built in the '30s but already there are ominous signs that in the end it may become a curse rather than a blessing. We motored along one of the canals it feeds and the land to one side was already waterlogged. The canal itself, too, badly needed weeding. In India, construction is of little permanent use without maintenance, and maintenance is too often forgotten—witness the crumbling mansions and tombs, the neglected gardens and brokendown walls along our route. In this climate fifty years of neglect will bring almost any building to ruin. The money may be there, as in the case of these canals, but it goes elsewhere, often into wrong hands. The roads fare worst of all. On our way to Kotra, no longer in Gwalior, we came upon a hole the size of a small pit. 'That has been there for three years,' said another Dutchman riding with us. A more glaring example was the state of the road beyond the dam, this time in Gwalior. It was once the highroad from Delhi



to the Deccan, and it still serves to link the highway to Nagpur with the Grand Trunk to Bombay. Yet for three miles, between Harsi and Narwar, it disappears altogether, and even where it survives it varies from quite good to abominable. Yet when care is taken, how admirable the results can be! The most impressive sight during our eighty miles of cross-country rocketing was a bridge built by the Moghuls for the old Grand Trunk road, which ran through Narwar. It was not so beautiful as the one at Nurabad, but much longer, with thirty-six arches all resting on massive piers and with a lovely blue-green river below sprinkled with rocks and bordered with reed and wheat. Almost equally impressive was the rock fortress at Narwar, in shape and size own sister to the one at Gwalior, with five miles of walls edging cliff and precipice 400 feet high. It was once crowned by temples, but Sikandar Lodi broke them down and built mosques instead,<sup>1</sup> a reminder that communalism did not start with British rule. On our way back we had tea above Harsi's lake and watched the sun set across the still water, as hill and forest darkened and geese flew homewards.

There are not many who can compare one Asiatic country with another. That gave a special interest to our march this morning, when we rode to Kotra, accompanied by the factory's Dutch chemist who, after many years in Java, has spent three in India, partly here and partly in the east of the U.P. The two countries, he thought, differed much more than one part of India differed from another. The peasantry round here, he said, were strong enough to work hard but too lazy to do so. One Javanese was equal to three of them in output. It was not a difference of climate—the climate here is the better of the two—but of psychology. In India, the common people are not interested in making money. If they were, they would work much harder, and in that case they could make ten rupees a day in the factory instead of the usual Re. 1/4. Caste is at the bottom of this, sapping all initiative. Caste, too, he said, had made people callous. Clerks are hard on those below them, and if anyone is in difficulties few will help, whereas

<sup>1</sup> *Gwalior State Gazetteer.*

in Java people will run to do so. I had a small example of this riding into Gwalior. A bullock cart struggling to get up a steep embankment had stuck near the top. By the roadside, a few feet away, there were four men squatting and talking together, but none of them lifted a finger to help until a mild taunt made one man, and one only, get up, and together, with the carter, we got the cart up to the top. On the other hand, more than once people have gone out of their way to help us. It is largely a matter of education, and it is not their fault that so many people are not educated.

Depressed by these comments from a man who struck me as sensible, I said later on to the manager, who has also lived in Java: 'Surely there must be something to be said for India in comparison with Java?' 'Only one thing,' he said: 'no Javanese ever gets beyond running a small shop by the roadside; but in India you have your Tatas and your Birlas. In Java, commerce and industry are entirely in the hands of European, Chinese, British Indian and Arab.' The manager is on the easiest terms with all he meets, and at one village where we stopped in the afternoon to have a word with the people, he set the children to race down a village lane for a small but much coveted bag of sugar. And down they came—'so many, and so many, and such glee'.

### *February 20—Kotra to Datia—13 miles*

We are now in our sixth Indian State,<sup>1</sup> and at Kotra, as also here, its capital, the State very kindly made us its guests. At Kotra the miniature rest-house, unoccupied throughout '46, was most obligingly furnished for our benefit with our Western necessities. Here all is space and splendour, with a score of large luxurious rooms at our service and an upper storey commanding fine views of fort, lake and palace. Crocodiles live in the lake and sometimes go shopping in the city. We were told at least that one was once found on the point of entering it by the old palace. This was built by Bir Singh, the founder of the present dynasty, in Jehangir's reign, and is an astonishing

<sup>1</sup> Datia is a little smaller than Luxembourg, with a population of 174,000 (1941).

agglomeration of walls, courts, colonnades and pavilions, all of stone with solid Hindu corbel and arch and here and there the remains of painted pattern and fresco, including a ring of gay fantastic dancers circling round the inner roof of a small dome. Like the fort, it is superbly placed on one of Datia's romantic hills, but the curse of murder is upon it. In 1602, Bir Singh murdered Abul Fazal, the pride of Akbar's court and culture and his favourite minister, merely to please Jehangir, who was jealous of his influence with Akbar. With the reward given him when Jehangir came to the throne, he built the palace at a cost of 32 lakhs, but he never lived in it, and no one has ever lived in it. How often in India, and with what labour, has stone been laid upon stone for no purpose but to gratify vanity and caprice.

The village we stopped at this morning was cleaner than many, and no one need have hesitated to sit on the well-plastered mud-brick platforms on either side of the doorways, to us a new feature in the village house. But within, the rooms—all on a Lilliput scale—were just caverns of darkness, often fouled by kitchen smoke, and containing only the barest necessities, with but few vessels of brass. The people had little to say for themselves—they had not yet broken yesterday's fast for Sheoratri, a fast mitigated only by milk—but when the hospital at Datia, seven miles away, was mentioned, a voice in the crowd called out—'No one cares for us there, and the medicine is bad'. There are thirty-five wells for the village lands, but no one has bothered to add to them for many years though the water level is only eighteen feet down. There also is a small village bank of twenty-three members, but its registers are kept in Datia and members' passbooks were not forthcoming until someone appeared with a number of them all entered up after 1944 in ink which only too clearly betrayed February 20, 1947. The Inspector spoke to the members in the voice of the petty official who regards the peasant as *canaille*—a common fault in the past. The village is not a large one, yet it has ten temples—once more a case of 'poor Periwinkle' paying for all. But the ten were nothing to what we saw when we rode on. Far away on a hill to the west were 184 built along a ridge and

sprinkled up and down the hillside, with their whitewashed walls like an array of meringues. All we could learn about them was that they were a place of pilgrimage for the Jain.

*February 21—Datia to Jhansi—19 miles*

Though the road that runs through the State is part of the link between northern and central India, like so much else it is going to pieces, and it was a sorry business riding along its stony edges. One almost envied Sleeman who found no metalled roads at all—until we reached Datia's railway station. There it suddenly improved and continued very respectably all the way to Jhansi, through country at first all bush and scrub, then as by a miracle all smiling crops and trees.

## Chapter IX

### BUNDELKHAND—JHANSI TO THE VINDHYAS

*February 22—Jhansi—Halt*

Here we are once more back in the U.P. and staying at yet another of its well-appointed Circuit Houses. But it was a shock to find that a letter of February 2 to the Collector asking him to arrange for our passage through the District had never reached him. Which explains why I have never heard from the Prime Minister, who had kindly promised me assistance and whom I had asked to put me in touch with the representatives of Congress at both Agra and Jhansi.

At a village meeting this morning I asked the lambardar,<sup>1</sup> who was squatting on a durrie a yard or two away in front of me, whether the people wanted freedom.

‘We don’t want swaraj,’ he persisted. ‘Whatever the Government, we have to serve it.’

Turning to the much younger headman sitting by the lambardar, I said : ‘You belong to the younger generation : what do *you* think ?’

‘I haven’t got as much experience as this man,’ was the cautious reply.

Then up got a much younger man, only eighteen years old, who said : ‘We must all work together, then all will be well.’

‘Are you a Communist ?’ I asked, and he was, but a gentle one, who had imbibed this simple but much needed doctrine of unity while working in a printing press in Jhansi.

‘Now,’ I said, turning back to the lambardar, who had the dignity and kindliness of face which often accompany age in the village, ‘you and I are of the same age ; tell me what you really think. I don’t want to eat lies.’

<sup>1</sup> In the U.P. he merely collects the land revenue ; in the Punjab he is also the headman.

<sup>2</sup> Self-government.

'With you sitting before me,' he replied, 'I said we want the English, but from the heart of my heart I want swaraj.' We all laughed at this *volte-face*, but it is one more lesson in the difficulty of getting at the peasant's real mind.

It was a pleasant-looking village with clean lanes, red-tiled houses—far more attractive than the square flat-topped roofs of the north—and a good sprinkling of trees, many more than in an ordinary Punjab village. But the houses are smaller with curiously low doorways, low even for this small-statured race, and the tanners had only dolls' houses. All, it was said, were having to buy millet for their bread in the black market at ten rupees a maund instead of seven, the controlled price, and to pay for this they have to sell most of their milk. 'Who has first claim on the milk?' I asked the lambardar.

'I have,' he said with a smile.

'And does the mother come last?' I asked, remembering what I have often been told in the Punjab.

'She is mistress and doesn't take it.'

What an example to those who control the distribution of sugar and cloth! This village had had some cloth three months ago and were expecting more shortly—rather better than what I have found elsewhere, but some said none had come their way.

What was to me a novel feature was that, if someone is well enough off to sink a well—there are sixty or seventy in the village—his neighbours may use it after he has taken all the water he wants for the day. In return they give him any help he needs; also milk, fuel and dung cakes if he runs short of them. What no longer surprised me was to find that, with all these wells and with Jhansi's market only two miles away, they grow no vegetables: '*Karan nabin ata*—making them doesn't come to us,' they said. As to poultry, when I asked about them, they just shook finger and head, as if something highly improper had been suggested. Only sweepers keep hens. It was the same sorry tale in the village near Gwalior.' 'How can people be anything but poor who do so little to help themselves?' I said to the Collector, an Indian from Malabar, in the evening. 'We

<sup>1</sup> See p. 227.

must teach them to do otherwise,' he replied. But when one looks at most of the teachers, one is not very sanguine. The missionary spirit is badly needed, and since I left the Punjab I have only met it once, and even in the Punjab it is not as common as it was. Or is that just the *laudator temporis acti*?

*February 23—Jhansi to Dukhwan—24 miles*

India's fugitive spring has passed with no more than a glimpse or two of peach blossom, and now we are into summer. So up we got at five and were off soon after six. A dust storm, our first, following a thunder-shower, gave us a cool eighteen-mile march to Babina, where we spent the day. We had no one with us, and for a change there is little to record. But just before reaching Chakarpur, the only village on the road to Babina, we came upon one of those spotless wayside shrines which express Hindu India at its best. It was dedicated to Hanuman, the monkey god, and looking over its high outer wall, in the shade of a large banyan tree, were the two attendants of the shrine, one of them naked to the waist and showing every rib of an emaciated body. Their chela or disciple was standing between them, clad only in a loin-cloth, and a beautiful figure he made, leaning over the wall with arm poised on knee and hand supporting chin. He looked at us with grave shining eyes, but when something we said amused him, gravity was lost in a winning smile. He recalled a young sadhu I met forty years ago in the Palace library at Udaipur. Finding him absorbed in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, I asked him what he was reading. 'I want to know all about the Greeks,' he said, and he was proposing to go right through the many volumes of the *E.B.* in his search and he was then only in Vol. I. He, too, had the gentle earnest look which in youth is strangely moving, and at the age of fourteen he had left home secretly in search of truth, seeking it first in the teaching of missionaries and, not finding it with them, he journeyed on to Benares, where he spent several years studying ancient Hindu philosophy at the feet of a guru. Repulsive is the bogus sadhu who fattens his naked ash-covered body on the alms of the

credulous—I met some on the road to Fatehpur Sikri—but very different is the sadhu who gives up everything most of us value to find the One. The young man leaning over the wall had evidently started on this great quest. I could not understand much of what the old man said, but he understood when I told him, not too presumptuously I hope, that I, too, was on a pilgrimage with the holy Narbada as my bourne, for his shrunken face broke into a beaming smile, and he said: ‘I see that you, too, are a sadhu.’

‘No, no! I have sinned too much.’

‘If a man will live for virtue and for God and rise early, then he will be happy.’

With that we left him, parting with many *Ram Rams* on both sides.

I had hardly gone a step when I met a very different young man on a bicycle—a Railway employee on ninety rupees a month and on his way to Jhansi from Chakarpur. He assured me that all Chakarpur’s 1,500 inhabitants were getting their quota of cloth, but this was not so with every village. What disgusted me, though I should be used to it by now, was to learn that in Jhansi everyone gets at least 1 lb. of sugar a month, plus another if they have an income of over Rs. 100 a month; yet all a villager gets is 2 oz., though no cane is grown. Those who want more must buy gur at Rs. 20 a maund. Badly does India need to adopt Atatürk’s motto—The Peasant First.

The young man agreed that the people were better off for the high prices. They don’t eat more, he said, but buy jewellery. For rich and poor in India jewellery has a magnetic attraction: for the well-to-do, as in the case of an Indian Collector we met, it may be diamonds; for the peasant it is bracelet, anklet and ring—only of silver, no doubt (outside the Punjab), nevertheless eating into their hard-earned savings. Travelling up from Bombay in October I shared a compartment with a merchant who produced from his coat-pocket sapphires worth thousands of pounds.

In India the earth is grey, black or red. Here it was red, and with jungle waste on either side red looks best. But

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 208-9.



the country was not all waste. Occasionally small fields of wheat appeared, all green and silver in the sunlight against dense dark trees. The bullocks drawing the carts, like the men, grow ever smaller, and also wilder and wilder. Amongst them came a pair from Hissar, giants amongst pigmies and a vivid reminder of the power and strength of the Punjab. But Bundelkhand, where we now are, is a very different country from the Punjab. For many hundred years it was the cockpit of Moghul and Mahratta, Bundela and bandit, with poor Periwinkle as usual paying for all.

In the evening with the sun setting, we rode on from Babina through undulating wooded country until before us lay a large lake and on its high bank a charming rest-house, our present abode. With the evening glow deepening in the west and a new moon poised above it, A. and I bathed in water caressingly warm.

### *February 24*

A day of peaceful leisured occupation and of 'lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore'.

### *February 25—Dukhwan to Talbahat—20 miles*

Three months today since I rode out of Peshawar, wondering whether our luck would hold even through the Punjab, and now here we are, by great good fortune, with over 1,100 miles to the credit of servant, truck and horse. The Narbada no longer seems impossibly far. Yet on these stony roads there's many a possible slip, and I count no mile until it is ridden.

We started at dawn with the great lake rapt in a silver dream under a sky slowly filling with colour. The road took us through a wild and lovely country of hill and woodland, giving way here and there to radiant cornfields ringed with the dark trunk and leaf of mahua<sup>1</sup> and mango. 'Yes,' said the grey-bearded Baldeo, 'that is the mahua and it produces *sharab* No. 1—No. 1 spirit.' We were watering and feeding our horses at a village (Sanori) and some cultivators, one very old, were watching the operation

<sup>1</sup> *Bassia latifolia*.

with the interest roused by any novel sight on the road. 'Do you drink this *sharab* No. 1?' I asked them. They shook their heads virtuously, and the old man said with pride that he had planted the fine trees under which we were standing. 'And why did you plant them?' I asked. A burst of general laughter was the answer. These people were poor, but how friendly and cheerful! A boy of ten or eleven was standing amongst them, and when I gave him a bit of the orange I was eating, he kept it clasped in not very clean fingers and continued to do so even when I told him he would get another as soon as he had eaten it. It was only when those around reassured him that he lifted it doubtfully to his lips and slowly sucked it. It was his first taste of orange.

Though it was ten o'clock, no one yet had had anything to eat. They eat twice a day and, as they grow no vegetables—'we have never done so'—their diet can't be very varied. Some eat meat when they can get it, but for most the only 'luxury' is what they can get from buffalo or cow when in milk. I noted yesterday how small the cattle are in these parts. The best of them, they said, cost 120 rupees—compare the many hundreds quoted north of Delhi<sup>1</sup>—and the smallest from twenty to forty.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, their best buffaloes give only ten pounds of milk a day. When I told them of the sixteen- to twenty-four-pound buffaloes of the Punjab and their price, one of them said: 'No one here could pay 800 rupees for anything, and only a few 300. In the Punjab they have almonds and raisins; here we have only berries. In the Punjab men live to a great age, here men are old at thirty.' The Punjab Muslim fears the domination of the Hindu, but the farther south we go, the more impossible it seems that anyone but a Punjabi should dominate the Punjab.

For the first time since we crossed the Chenab we heard the slow creaking threnody of the Persian wheel—a voice from the north and the happy past. South of the Chenab

<sup>1</sup> See p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> Compare: 'The average price of good plough cattle is Rs. 50 each . . . good milch buffaloes fetch as much as Rs. 60. Indigenous cattle seldom sell for more than Rs. 20 to Rs. 30 per head'—*Jhansi Dt. Gazetteer*, 1909, p. 31.

the wheels are of iron and make no pleasant harmony, and south of the Jumna the large shining leather bucket, already described,<sup>1</sup> takes their place, and except for a few in Gurgaon, it was not till we got to Datia that we saw the wheel and its pots again, and only today were the wheels of wood and the pots of earth. 'We can't afford pots of iron,' said the people of one village. When timber has not to be bought, the whole set-up with the usual sixty to a hundred pots still costs, they said, only 25 rupees; otherwise eighty to ninety. With one large wheel and two rounds of spokes it is much simpler than the three-wheel Punjab affair.

The march ended with the sight of Talbahat's half-ruined crenelated fort rising straight from the blue water of the large tank at its feet. Built over 300 years ago (in 1618), it became the stronghold of a succession of small chieftains, the last of whom in '57 took the side that lost.

*February 26—Talbahat to Bansi via Damkana—14 miles*

This morning we got off at six. Talbahat with its gaily frescoed houses was still slumbering at the foot of its crumbling fort, and the only sound came from the whirr of unseen grindstones, each pair with its own note, sometimes high, sometimes low. We were back on the highroad, and it was one of the best, with soft verges of red earth made by someone who had not forgotten the horse. I don't think we have seen anyone on horseback since Gwalior, and not many since we left the Punjab, and now no one accompanies us, even on a bicycle. The road was well treed: neem and imli were still shedding last year's leaves, but the shisham shone with all the greenery of spring—one more reminder of the Punjab, its home.

I stopped at Damkana on the way. With its red-brick red-tiled houses it looked better built than any village I have seen since Hoshiarpur. But what poverty within! I thought the Datia village bad, but this was worse. Two poor harvests—the old tale first heard north of the Jhelum—have left the people with so little grain that nearly all must

<sup>1</sup> p. 206.

buy it in order to live. The lucky ones get permits to buy millet<sup>1</sup> at the controlled rate of Rs. 8/8 a maund, but only eight annas' worth at a time. The others have to pay nearly eleven rupees in the black market. This explains the crowd I saw in the Talbahat bazaar yesterday—some tamasha, I thought; but no, it was just to get their turn with a man squatting on the ground in the middle of them and slowly weighing out the grain in his scales. I asked an old cultivator what he had eaten this morning when he got up. 'Only the fruit of the ber after brushing my teeth,' and he pointed to the tree above us and its reddening berries—a dry, unappetizing fruit, but welcome enough when you have only one meal a day. And that was the condition of most of the thirty-odd people present. Only five said they had eaten twice yesterday. 'Yet before the war we ate three times a day.'

Were they telling me the truth? That is the question always in my mind at these meetings—and at first they weren't. The talk started with shoes. Bundelkhand has its own shoe, unlike any other I have seen in India but not entirely unlike a sixth century B.C. shoe worn by a bearded warrior on a Greek wine-cup<sup>3</sup> helping the new-born Athena out of Zeus's head. It has two large leather flaps, one rising high behind the heel, the other in front of the ankle, designed, it is said, to protect the foot from jungle bush and thorn. They cost five rupees a pair. That was easy to find out. But how many pairs had a man got? That was more difficult. One of the few men with two ploughs—only one man in the village has three—said he had only one pair. That I could hardly believe. 'I have come a long way,' I said, speaking in terms I thought they might understand; 'and I have not come to eat deception. Tell me the truth—how many pairs have you?' 'Two,' he said, and everyone laughed; and I think they applied the moral, for after that there were always some who owned

<sup>1</sup> *Jowar*.

<sup>2</sup> Inquiry in 1888 showed that 'a very small proportion of the population were underfed, a man even in the poorest circumstances thinking it a hardship to have less than three meals a day'—*Jbansi Dt. Gazetteer*, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> Made by Phrynos (Brit. Mus.).

to being better off than others. Pursuing the matter of shoes, I asked—‘Why are so many of you shoeless?’—more than I had ever seen at a meeting. ‘We have none,’ they said.

‘Surely some of you have left them at home?’

‘No, no,’ they assured me, and someone lifting up his neighbour’s foot said, ‘Look at this’, and heel and sole were cracked and furrowed like an old walnut. Out of the twenty-six present, eighteen said they had no shoes, and it was said that this applied to most of the village and that before the war all had had them.

From shoes to clothes. At Jhansi the claim was made that rationed goods were on the whole fairly distributed in the District, and certainly since we entered it, the people have been better dressed than most of those we met between Agra and Jhansi, and their clothes cleaner. Today the cleanliness was there, but loud was the complaint of the way cloth was given out. The old man sitting at my feet said he had had nothing for a year, and others nothing since midsummer. Only four out of the twenty-six admitted having more than one loin-cloth, yet before the war, they said, they all had at least two (very necessary for decency as well as comfort) plus waistcoat,<sup>1</sup> shirt, turban and cotton plaid. That any cloth had been given out was something, but it seemed to have been done very unevenly, and with what trouble to those who got it! First there is the permit, and that means going to Talbahat six miles away, several times perhaps before one is at the right end of the queue, and then follow more visits to convert the permit into cloth. Elsewhere, deficiencies are made up by purchases in ‘the black’, and thanks to the high prices and their proceeds this has proved a safety-valve for feelings which might otherwise have exploded. But to these wretches with nothing to sell high prices are a curse, and in this area there are many others, it is said, in the same state. Sugar gives another turn to the screw. Only four in the village had managed to get any.

The destruction of the poor is their poverty. These people eke out a living by working for a contractor in the

<sup>1</sup> *Saluka*.

forests around them, and all a man earns is eight annas a day, or one rupee if he brings along a bullock cart. Before the war, with a cart he got twelve annas a day. The increase, therefore, is a bare 33 per cent against a rise in prices of over 300 per cent. They might almost have been Government servants! When I mentioned these rates to two gazetted officers of the District, whom I happened to meet a little later on the road, they swore that I had been taken in, as so often happens when one mentions something surprising about the village, but the bystanders confirmed it. To them there was nothing surprising about it: they are too used to being exploited.

And that was not the only example of exploitation in the village. I could hardly believe my ears when a harsh, high-pitched voice, which had been shouting things at me, said that the local District Co-operative Bank charges the village bank 12 per cent on its loans, thus forcing the village bank to charge its members 15 per cent! The more I see of co-operative thrift and credit in the U.P., the less real I find it—no depositors amongst the members, no knowledge of their banks' affairs, societies run by circle secretaries with all the evils of that bad system, and a supervising staff, with a few exceptions, quite unequal to the difficult job of helping the peasant out of his difficulties and ruts. This is only an impression, not a judgement, and if it is mistaken, it is partly because I have been left much more to my own devices than in the Punjab. Though I am now in my fifth U.P. district, I have met only one Assistant Registrar, and no one higher up. One Supervisor, to whom I was handed over, was a complete nitwit, and another's education had not gone beyond a Middle school. Unless more trouble is taken in the selection, training and control of her lower personnel, India will never be modernized, and the first step is to pay them better.

There was a chorus of *Ram Rams* when I left the village, and no chorus could have sounded friendlier. But why don't they grow vegetables, I asked the Deputy Director of Agriculture, whom I met later, when they have wells and a good market within reach? Because, he said, the people of Bundelkhand are lazy, and the people of Jhansi

are the laziest of all. It is what the Dutchmen said of the people round Dabra.<sup>1</sup>

At Bansi, a bazaar-village of 2,300 inhabitants, I stumbled on extreme poverty again. I was prowling round its outskirts in the evening trying to find the odd patches of vegetables of which I had heard, when I came upon a colony of dolls' houses inhabited by Kachhis<sup>2</sup> who grew them, mainly onions, on their tiny holdings. Each house consisted of two rooms, one for humans, the other for cattle, and each entered by a doorway just large enough for a small cow to shuffle through. I had almost to crawl to look inside, and at first, filling up the whole doorway, I could see nothing. Nor was there much to see—merely a single string-bed standing in a confusion of bedding and pots and pans. There were two of these hovels side by side; in one, four shared the bed, in the other, five. 'This is how I sleep,' said one man, showing me the most ragged loin-cloth I have ever seen and wrapping himself in his cotton plaid. 'And that's where I sleep,' he added, pointing to a pile of straw in front of his dwelling. 'Have you no bed?' I asked.

'It would be too cold to sleep on that.' The straw at least kept him warm below.

There was a little girl standing by us, three to four feet high. I should have given her at most seven or eight years but for a curious grown-up look in her face. 'She is twelve years old' (eleven according to our reckoning), said her grandmother, a wizened little dwarf just the right size for the doorways. She had been married three years, and last year went to the house of her fifteen-year-old husband, but, said the grandmother, she came back—and heads were shaken significantly. She was shoeless but decked with silver ornaments—anklet, bracelet, armband, earstud—a pair of each—and a necklace, the whole costing, according to the prices quoted, 46 rupees. 'Surely,' I protested to the grandmother, 'you should not have spent so much when you are so poor.' 'But all this', she replied, 'came from her husband.' Were his circumstances any better? I wondered.

<sup>1</sup> p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> Kachhis are market gardeners and 'cultivators of a high order'—*Dt. Gazetteer*, p. 89.

The village has no dispensary for either man or beast—the nearest is at Lalitpur thirteen miles away—but it has ten goldsmiths! One of them was standing at the door of his mansion as I passed by, and that led to talk. He denied that there had been any increase in their work, but with the rise in prices they had doubled their charges. People, he said, go to Lalitpur, and there business is 50 per cent up. Only silver ornaments are made, but these are far more freely worn than in the Punjab. This began to be marked round Agra, and now it is rare to see a woman, however poor, without both anklet and bracelet.

If one stops to talk to anyone in an Indian bazaar, others always gather round. This happened now, and amongst those who stopped to see what was passing was the local representative of Congress, so well dressed that it was clear that at least one man in Bansi got his full quota of cloth. In this district the distribution of rationed articles has been entrusted to committees of non-officials, chosen no doubt under Congress guidance. The Committee here has twenty-one members—four cultivators and seventeen shopkeepers. ‘How many shopkeepers are there in Bansi?’ I asked.

‘Forty,’ replied my well-dressed friend.

‘And how many cultivators are there in the Committee’s area?’

‘About 50,000.’

‘Is that your idea of democracy, that forty should be represented by seventeen, and 50,000 by only four?’ There was no answer to this, but rows of white teeth showed in the crowd.

‘Tell me,’ I continued, ‘what is Congress’s policy here?’

‘First of all, *sangtan*—unity; then the removal of untouchability.’

‘Can untouchables go into the temples?’ I asked, I fear a little maliciously, for I had just been to one of the temples. He fell into the tiny trap and said yes. But the temple priest had told me they were not allowed. There is no end to the attempts to mislead one, some wishing to please, others to deceive, some even deceiving themselves. This was perhaps a case of the last.



The temple priest said that in recent years the influence of the Brahmin had declined by only four annas in the rupee, but a younger Brahmin who joined us later put it at eight annas. In answer to the inevitable question about freedom, a much older Brahmin declared in passionate terms: 'We are not getting freedom. Freedom was in the old days. Now there is great trouble from Congress: it's those with influence who get the cloth and the sugar, and it is the *paisawale*—the moneyed—who have the influence.' An all too familiar complaint.

Here we are lodged in another fort, also built over 300 years ago. In this borderland forts are as common as castles on the Rhine.

*February 27—Bansi to Lalitpur—13 miles*

For some time I have been sleeping in the open verandah which every rest-house has, but last night, tempted by a young moon sinking in the west and the Great Bear climbing in the north, I slept on the battlements under the open sky. Overhead were jewels unnumbered, the only kind I love, and there were still as many, old and new, when I rose at five, and a ghostly milky way shimmered in the east. When an hour later I passed through Bansi's deserted street, it was to a symphony of whirring grindstones.

Here at Lalitpur only one bed-and-bathroom was available for the three of us at first, but now I have a small servant's tent to dress in. Lalitpur is the headquarters of a Sub-Division in the Jhansi District, and there are at least three gazetted officers here. One, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, gave us all possible help in satisfying the needs which accumulate on a tour of this kind. Another also could not have been more helpful until I had to refuse a request—I had never seen him before—that I should write to 'H.E.' recommending him for an appointment he wanted, whereupon he disappeared for good. If we had a claim on anyone's good offices, it was on the third, but in spite of a note on arrival to say I hoped to see him, I was not privileged to do so!

<sup>1</sup> His Excellency, i.e. the Governor.

*February 28—Lalitpur to Gona—21 miles*

The Collector advised us to break the journey to Gona and sleep the night at Birdha. Did he know that the rest-house there is now the abode of goats and that the only possible place of refuge is a police lock-up without a stick of furniture? But one has to tour on a horse to be interested in such trifles. We spent the middle hours of the day under trees in front of the lock-up and a village boy kindly brought me a metal chair, on which I sat and typed with typewriter poised on a suitcase in front of me.

But I am a little ahead of the day's doings. Birdha is a large village with a police post and a bazaar dividing the village in two. When I got there, I found an excited crowd gathered round a Brahmin and a shopkeeper, who had just been intercepted taking wheat bought in one village at Rs. 22 a maund—the controlled price is Rs. 12—to be sold in a townlet a few miles away at Rs. 26. The black market in full swing with a vengeance. A representative of Congress, who said he was the secretary of the local distribution committee, joined the crowd, which now gathered round me, and in the loud harsh voice of the bully, and with a face to match, he jawed away at me full of indignation at the doings of the black marketeers and of the hardships of the people. But when I walked on with a sharp-witted inhabitant, who was in a position to know, he said he was in the thick of the racket, and a cultivator who appeared later described him as bogus (*banaoti*) and said that he was working hand in glove with his shopkeeper brother. I have heard from more than one trustworthy source that the local representatives of Congress often abuse the power put into their hands with the distribution of sugar and cloth. A few are just, but most, it is said, think only of lining their pockets, to the disgust of the countryside, which is becoming more and more critical of Congress and its Government.

There is a tragic reason for the very high prices I have just quoted. When Sleeman rode through this country (by a different route), he found the wheat crop destroyed by rust (*girwa*), and here it is again, the result of heavy rain followed by persistent cloud. The ear is streaked and

spotted with a rusty red and inside everything shrivels. As we were sitting at breakfast, a peasant came up with a sheaf to show us the havoc. The kanungo, of whom more anon, says that in his circle (one quarter of the tehsil) the loss will be eight to twelve annas in the rupee.

There were a dozen cultivators in the crowd that gathered round me in Birdha, and they all said they had to buy their food grain and that they ate only once a day. The atmosphere of a bazaar is less conducive to truth than the shade of a village tree. So when I came away with the patwari, I asked him what he thought about it. He said they all had two meals a day. A Birdha cultivator, who appeared later and who had heard nothing, said this was the case with most cultivators but about 10 per cent (forty out of 400) were now reduced to one meal. This is probably the truth, or as near it as one can get, for he admitted that he himself had three meals. The shortage of food grains has been brought home to us by the difficulty we have had in getting grain for our horses. When we invoked the Collector's assistance at Jhansi, he said we should have no difficulty in getting it at Lalitpur. But this proved a complete delusion, and it was only thanks to the good offices of the police at Birdha that we were able to get some millet there.

At four o'clock our horses, who had been whisking away the flies with their tails, were re-saddled and we started off again for the remaining ten miles. The march gave us the hottest hour we have yet had, and it would have been hotter but for the fine roadside trees. Collar and tie have long since been discarded, and we wear the khaki jodhpurs made for us at Agra in great haste by a tailor who evidently feared we should swell with the heat. So far in this district I have had no one with me on my marches. On one occasion two Co-operative Supervisors followed in a tonga to show me a village, and on another a third Supervisor promised to accompany me on a bicycle, but 6 a.m. was too early for him and he only turned up when I had got in. I had been promised a fourth at Lalitpur, but I never even saw him. A complete stranger riding through a District is an obvious nuisance to busy officials, yet it seemed silly to ride through it with no one at hand to tell

one about it. So this morning, before leaving Lalitpur, I wrote and asked the S.D.O. to be good enough to spare me the services of a kanungo for a day. The kanungo turned up at Bansi on a bicycle and, with his knowledge of the District, proved an instructive companion. He described the people as bone lazy; 'incapable of prolonged effort and sustained labour' is the way the *District Gazetteer* puts it,<sup>1</sup> and is it surprising after all they have endured in the past from both nature and man? From nature, repeated famine,<sup>2</sup> pest and blight; from man, until the Pax Britannica reigned, all the evils of unending turbulence and strife.

Most of the cultivators are one-plough men, and poor as they still are, they are decidedly better off, said the kanungo, than before the war. One sign of this is the much larger number of silver ornaments worn by women. Of the war they know next to nothing. A two-plough tenant I walked along with this morning said in a gentle, resigned voice: 'What can we know, we who live in the jungle?' All he knew, indeed, was that the Germans had fought against us, 'And who else?' I asked. 'Nepal' was the unexpected reply. He knew nothing of Japan, and of the result of the war he said: 'There is no knowing who won, who lost.'

'Do you want freedom?' I asked, changing the subject.

'Yes, then there will be no more working for wages.' He is one of the many who nowadays live only by working on the road or in the forest, and the only freedom they want is to be free of toiling for another—economic, not political freedom; and who will give them that?

'Have you heard that we are leaving India next year?' I continued, remembering Attlee's statement of eight days ago.

'As the Presence wishes' was the helpless, thy-will-be-done reply. Later on I asked the peasant who brought the shrivelled wheat what *he* knew about the war. All he would say was that we had fought against America, and the Germans and Japs had helped us! Poor Periwinkle, like Mr Tulliver, finds this 'a puzzling world'.

<sup>1</sup> p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> There is a local saying that a famine may be expected every fifth year—*Dt. Gazetteer*, p. 61.

With the humbler ranks of officialdom, sooner or later one gets on to the subject of pay. Birdha's patwari walking along beside me spoke of the difficulty of maintaining a wife and three children on Rs. 28 a month. The salary is at least a few rupees better than the 22 which the P.W.D. cooly gets. How, I wonder, does a Government expect its servants to be honest when it gives them these impossible salaries? The evil is common to every Province and State we have passed through and has led to many strikes. The headmaster of Bansi's primary school told me yesterday that, thanks to a three weeks' strike, or hartal as he called it, his pay has been put up five rupees to the princely figure of 43 rupees a month. His two Assistants get ten rupees less, just about what a ploughman gets!

There are three wild creatures I love to see on the road—the little striped squirrel, the peacock, and the large grey ape or langur. The squirrel has been with us from the start, all whirrs and whisks of his bushy tail; the peacock, gorgeous and solemn as a pontiff, only appeared south of the Sutlej and after adorning field, tree and roof from Delhi to Agra is no more with us. But in his place we have the fantastical langur. With his blackamoor face bonneted in white fur, his paws smartly gloved in black, and his high curling tail, so long that he can tickle his back with the tip, he leaps from tree to tree with all the agility and grace of Hanuman himself. Two creatures I detest: both are obscene—the monkey with his red behind and the vulture with the long red-skinned neck of a plucked fowl.

This was the last of our fifteen marches through the U.P., and since Jhansi they have taken us through a most romantic country, with lake and fort, wood and hill, and with the roadside villages not plastered with advertisements as so often north of Delhi, but offering the passer-by pictures of elephant and tiger, bowman and hunter, merchant and warrior, dancer and god. The end of the day brought us to the foot of the Vindhya—the hills of the Hunter—which divide the Madhyadesha or 'middle land' of the Aryan invaders from the non-Aryan Deccan. Their long low line stretching from east to west recalled our approach to the Salt Range, but with a difference—they

are thickly wooded and flat as the sea, which once flowed over them.

*March 1—Gona—Halt*

When this morning before breakfast I met the very simple people of Gona, there was one person there who was not simple—the President of the local Congress Committee, a young Thakur Rajput of 27. His face had the hard discontented look of those who want more than they can get and get more than they should. Very different was his bearded father who, with another bearded veteran, was sitting on a low wall near me. I was on a chair—no one thinks that a sahib can sit on anything else—and others were scattered round, the Thakurs on string bed or wall, the humbler cultivators squatting on the ground, and the tanners at a distance. As elsewhere, Thakur and Brahmin may sit on the same string bedstead, the Brahmin at the head, the Thakur at the foot; but the other cultivators may not sit with either. Similarly, an untouchable may not sit with the cultivators. Nor may he enter the village temple. ‘What about washing after being touched by him? Is that still done?’ I asked. ‘That is of the past,’ said the president solemnly. But he was wrong, as a question to one of the older men showed.

Not much democracy about this, but one could not blame the Congress Committee for having failed to change ancient custom within a year of their appointment. What did surprise me was to find that the Committee had not been elected but nominated, a method for years strongly denounced by Congress when practised by us. The nominating authority (at Lalitpur) gave Brahmin and shopkeeper eleven representatives and the cultivators only twelve; yet, to quote the President’s figures, Brahmin and shopkeeper represented at most 1,000 persons, and the cultivators 60,000. Still less democratic was the fact that village servant and untouchable were unrepresented. ‘They are illiterate’ was the President’s excuse. But again he was wrong. There was a blacksmith present who could read and write, and there were other village servants who could do the same. Nehru and his colleagues would, I

know, entirely disapprove of this, and I told the President so. Nomination demands three conditions: the wearing of homespun, working for Congress, and a clean sheet in regard to crime. The President was wearing a knitted waistcoat above his homespun dhoti and shirt. This, he said, was permissible. As the hair shirt to religion, so is homespun to politics.

In spite of their poverty, people's clothes look much cleaner in this District than farther north. There they are washed only twice a month, but here once a week and dhotis every day. But, alas, spinning was given up fifty years ago, the wheels put to silence by the machines of the new age, and with its decay has gone the cultivation of cotton, which was still being grown when the two grey-beards were beardless. Those days were better, they said, true to their age: wheat was then 32 seers, oil eight seers, and ghi four seers to the rupee, prices fifteen to twenty times lower than those of today. 'But which would you rather have?' I asked, 'these very low prices or the very high prices of today?'

'What is good is to be able to nourish the body.'

My next question—'Are people more truthful now?'—produced a more definite opinion.

'They are not,' was the emphatic reply. 'In those days the panchayat used to settle matters between lender and borrower; now men go to court, and there lawyers say—you must speak falsehood or you will not win your case.' The Maharaja of Dholpur said the same.<sup>1</sup> The fact is, indeed, notorious. A surprisingly long pause greeted my next question—'You have said how much better the old times were, but surely there is some point in which the present is better than the past?' When no answer came, a bania, after his kind, called out, 'Everyone has money in his hand.' But a better answer came from the President's father: 'There is now less pressure (*dabban*).'<sup>2</sup> It was his way of saying that people were less submissive. Of this we had a hint last night when we wanted a third bed. In the old days, said the kanungo, there would have been no difficulty about this, but now the people look upon the loan of a bed as *corvée*. The Punjab rest-houses have three

<sup>1</sup> p. 221.

beds ; there seemed, therefore, no need to take a camp bed, which would have avoided this difficulty.

The balance was sent tilting back to the old days with my next question : ‘ Is there more or less bribery than before ? ’ ‘ More, and there can be no freedom as long as there is bribery. Look at the controls ! ’

Most had had some cloth in the last three months, but some none for six and one or two for longer. I made the highly popular suggestion that, if the committee could not get the village their fair share of cloth and grain, as alleged, the President should do *dharna* and sit on the appropriate doorstep until he got what he wanted ; and should that fail, let him do a hunger-strike. The suggestion amused him less than his neighbours and was perhaps a little too light-hearted for so serious a subject. But how are the ignorant and the poor to get their share of these necessities if they haven’t someone to make life really uncomfortable for those who have all the comforts they want ?

The grain position is alarming owing to the rust which, said the patwari, has reduced the wheat crop (not the barley) from sixteen to four annas. It has come back after nineteen years, but it is not as bad as fifty years ago when, said one of the greybeards, ‘ there was not even seed left ’. With such a shortage of food, one wonders whether some at least of the large tracts of waste land we have seen on our route could not be brought under the plough, with the help of the bulldozer to clear away bush and scrub and break up the soil. Here, for example, only 1,500 out of 3,700 acres are cultivated, and according to the patwari, doubtless no expert, this could be increased by 500 acres. But with their lack of energy and resources the people cannot be expected to take the initial steps. That must be done by Government.

The meeting was not quite so serious as all this sounds. It actually began with the boys who were present showing me the game called *kho*, a kind of ‘ touch ’, played by two boys running round a number of others seated at intervals on the ground ; and there is another played with lime (*kankar*) on a strangely shaped pattern of lines engraved in stone. But these games are less played than before, and



that at least must be put against the present. On the other hand, people no longer drink. That, said a greybeard, was stopped by Government forty years ago. The berries of the mahua are eaten instead of being turned into 'spirit No. 1'. The people still do ceremonial reverence to their ancestors in September, but few go on pilgrimages and no one does them on foot. Only two of those present had been to Jagannath, Allahabad and Benares, and no one as far afield as Rameshwaram. The little tulsi bush<sup>1</sup> is now a common sight in the courtyards. It is beloved of the Hindu and he worships it daily. Its quality is thrice blest. If a cold gives him a headache, he eats its leaves; if he needs a rosary, he uses its wood; and if he wants sweet air, he just lets it grow. The air now is almost entirely Hindu.

Though Gona has about 1,500 inhabitants, its only modern amenity, apart from the excellent metalled road which passes by it, is a primary school with forty boys. The nearest dispensary for man and beast is at Mahroni, eighteen miles away by unmetalled road. For the sick there is nothing nearer than a goldsmith (two miles away) who treats patients on Vedic lines with, as usual, no diploma of any kind. No one has any up-to-date agricultural implement, and if anyone wants selected seed, he must go to Mahroni, and even then he will only get it, so I was told, if he goes with at least five others and one of the six guarantees payment. The village map showed that holdings badly needed consolidation, and with only three kinds of land in the village and a mere 25 acres irrigated by well this should not be difficult. The people said they had never had a visit from either the Co-operative or the Agricultural Department. This may not be true, but that it should be said is significant.

This evening on our way to another village we met a soldier for the first time in this District. His eighteen months' service, too, had not taken him farther than Jhansi. Very different from the Punjab.

Baldeo, our head groom, who has seen a good deal of the Indian world during his fifty years' service, touched on another difference when I asked him the other day what he

<sup>1</sup> *Occimum sanctum*.

thought of the prospect of freedom. 'The Punjab', he replied, 'has a kind of freedom. There are roads, there are schools, there are hospitals. But for the poor it will not be good if you go. In the *Nawabi* days, when a bride was taken away for *muklawā*—consummation—a Nawab would take her and only let her go the next day.' But times have changed, I urged. 'A true word, but when you go, they will be as before.' These simple creatures who have moved much amongst their own kind and who have the experience of a lifetime behind them often have a shrewder historical sense than many who can put B.A., LL.B. and I know not what after their names. And though history does not repeat itself, yet, as Churchill once observed, the farther one looks back, the farther one can look forward.

<sup>1</sup> cf. the Brahmin at p. 207.

## Chapter X

### THE CENTRAL PROVINCES

#### I—INTO THE VINDHYAS

*March 2—Gona to Malthone—8 miles*

In a long ride of this kind with its endless succession of villages, bullock carts, open fields and roadside trees, the passage from one province to another is an event; also a spur, for with everything to learn eye and ear are more than ever on the watch. Today we entered the Central Provinces, the cradle of the Narbada. That alone gave the march a touch of excitement. The Vindhyas rose before us like a wall, and as we climbed up through their songless jungles, we wondered what manner of people we should find beyond. It was some miles before we reached the U.P. boundary, marked by a milestone which said 'Jhansi 81 miles; Saugor 42', and a little later we came upon the first village, which had one novel feature—its fields were ringed with tombstones, so they seemed, to keep out the wild pig. On reaching the top, we found ourselves on an undulating and densely wooded plateau, which recalled the Ardennes. Despite our 1,700 feet, for the first time the heat has been oppressive, and in the middle of the day two garments, shorts and shirt, were more than enough.

In the evening I wandered down the stony hillside to have a look at Malthone, a village of 1,500 inhabitants, and I had a long talk with a young pleader who, when his father died, gave up his practice at the bar to carry on the family banking business. Based on an interest rate of 24 per cent, the common rate from Delhi southwards, it had brought the family affluence, but he is not happy about it and is trying to wind it up. With the fall in prices in 1930, few could repay their debts and Conciliation Boards were appointed. His dues were scaled down by 50 per cent and instalments fixed for repayment of the balance in twenty

years—a necessary measure, he said, which is not what money-lenders said at the time. Now he is wisely turning to Co-operation and proposes to start a society to supply Malthone with its daily needs. What Malthone wants even more (like Gona) is a Medical Aid Society, for the nearest dispensary is at Khurai, 25 miles away by unmetalled road. This is worse than anything I have come across elsewhere and recalls the conditions which produced the famous Health Societies of Yugoslavia. For once cattle do better than humans, for there is a Veterinary Surgeon, but only because the cattle coming from the U.P. have to be inoculated. One facility I was surprised to find after what I have seen in much less remote spots—primary schools for both boys and girls.

Like most banias in this area, the lawyer is a Jain, a community which carries the fundamental Hindu doctrine of *ahimsa*—of not taking life—to its logical extreme.<sup>1</sup> Strict Jains will not kill a snake or even fly or mosquito—many were the flies I had to kill at Gona—and to guard against accidents, they will not eat after sunset for fear some unseen insect should be swallowed. However little one may be tempted to imitate them, one must marvel at this attitude in a country teeming with life hostile to man, and it shows what self-control India is capable of under the influence of religion. But one extreme breeds another, for, to quote the *District Gazetteer*, ‘they sometimes place a lamp under a sieve so that the shafts of light may resemble the sun’s rays, and eat by the light of that’.<sup>2</sup> Whatever its merits, *ahimsa* doesn’t make for agricultural progress. Here the monkeys have it all their own way and are so voracious that neither garden nor orchard is possible.

As we sat talking, pleasantly disposed on a stone platform in the middle of the village, the sun set and the white cotton clouds in the blue sky turned to apricot and rose. No one paid the lovely sight the slightest attention, until I asked the lawyer and a neighbour sitting beside me—both spoke English—whether this kind of thing gave them any pleasure. ‘It is an attitude of mind’ was the evasive reply.

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> *Saugor Dt. Gazetteer*, 1907, p. 49.

‘But what about the cultivators? Do they get any pleasure?’

‘They are not educated.’ But I have rarely found even the educated take much notice of either sunrise or sunset, still less of the subtler beauties of nature.

For one small change I bless the C.P.—their rest-houses have mattresses!

*March 3—Malthone to Pali—15 miles*

Our first hot night, and a single blanket was all I wanted sleeping in the verandah. But this is not the real heat. That would mean no covering at all. The road has deteriorated since we left the U.P.; so, too, the roadside trees. But the country is wilder than ever, with jungles on either side, line after line of flat-topped hills in front, and broad fertile valleys in between, now ‘white unto harvest’. A discharged soldier, only the second we have met since Agra, hearing that we had ridden from Peshawar, asked in surprise, ‘Why have you not come by rail?’ ‘In that case,’ said A., ‘looking out from the train, we should have said—What a fine harvest! But now we know that you have no harvest at all.’ ‘Was there ever a more smiling illusion?’ she added, turning to me. Looking at the miles and miles of full-grown stalk and beard, all of the palest gold, one would have said ‘a sixteen-anna crop’; yet, when some of it was pulled up and put into our hands and we rubbed the ears, only a few shrivelled grains appeared. It is a major disaster, and what makes it bitter is that in December there was hope of an eighteen-anna crop. ‘We are fourteen in the house,’ said a two-plough cultivator, ‘and only three who work. Our grain is finished. Now we eat once a day, not at all in the evening. Before we ate twice. No, we don’t get the maize at the controlled price: that goes to the Jains. We get only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  seers to the rupee.’

‘How then do you live?’

‘We work for hire with our carts and get two rupees a day.’ Which is at least one rupee more than the wretches round Bansi get.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rs. 16 a maund.

<sup>2</sup> p. 249.

'Does anyone look after you?' I continued.

'What, your Honour?'

'Is there no care of you?'

'*Kachhu nahin*—nothing at all, no *parvasti*—no cherishing.'

'Has the Deputy Commissioner done anything for you?'

'*Kachhu nahin*—no one asks about our lot.'

'Doesn't Congress help you?'

'Not at all. They have put a great burden of controls upon us. We can live no more. They have left us nothing.'

'Who did you vote for in the election?'

'Congress. We all gave Congress our vote.'

All this he said as he walked along with us, in the sad, gentle voice of those who are at once too timid and too refined to proclaim their miseries to the world. Another peasant who waylaid us echoed the first: 'We work all day and in the evening there is nothing to eat.' The feeling is one of helplessness in the face of calamity. The new order has given the peasant the vote, but of what use is that without bread?

In the village where we stopped to feed our horses the usual crowd of villagers gathered, at first curious, then friendly, and we were followed out of it by a number of children who wished to see us ride away, so rare now is the sight of anyone on a horse. We rode through forest after forest, each one the abode of tiger, panther and deer, but we saw neither man nor beast. 'Spring and autumn here danc'd hand in hand' in a rich harmony of russet and green, and at one point A. with her quick eye spied the first trumpet flowers of the Flame of the Forest,<sup>1</sup> whose scarlet dye stains merry-makers at Holi.

Two little incidents, one yesterday, the other today, deserve to be set side by side. Baldeo, our faithful seventy-year-old groom, is down with fever, which yesterday touched nearly 102. A. consulted the vet and showed such concern that he exclaimed, 'Why should you take so much trouble over this fellow—he is only a servant?'! For him the era of the common man had not yet dawned.

<sup>1</sup> *Butea frondosa*.

The other incident tells of the common man himself. We were walking along leading our horses when we met a peasant with an armful of freshly plucked gram.<sup>1</sup> We stopped for a word and, as we talked, he began giving the gram to the horses, and nothing we said could dissuade him from giving them the whole lot. Yet gram is now selling at over Rs. 26 a maund—1½ seers to the rupee. The smile of pleasure on his face showed that he did not give that a thought. So, too, with the gur given us on the road to Khanna.<sup>2</sup> The peasant's generosity recalls the widow's mite.

Here again there are mattresses, but for basin only a vegetable dish, large enough, however, to wash a pair of hands.

*March 4—Pali to Saugor, as it is officially written, or Sagar, as it is called locally—24 miles*

It would have been only 22 miles had we been lodged at the Circuit House as officially promised some days ago, but others had got in and we had two more weary miles under the hot midday sun to that detestable but necessary institution, the Dak Bungalow. And when we got there after nearly six hours on the road, it was to find only one set of rooms available for the three of us, and we had to wait till sunset for another, making the afternoon siesta demanded by an early start, almost impossible. Dak Bungalows are miniature barracks, built in the same uncompromising straight lines, with each set of rooms opening on to a verandah, which is just a public thoroughfare. Their compounds are full of flies, which fly in and out of the rooms through broken windows and crooked chicks;<sup>3</sup> a damp smell of stale bath water infects the bathrooms, and the dust and debris churned up by the passing traffic foul the air. But, as Touchstone said, 'travellers must be content'.

The march here was one of the most beautiful and varied we have had: at first through jungles full of bamboos nodding 'in clustered grace' and spraying the sky with russet and green; then out of the forest into a sea of

<sup>1</sup> *Cicer arietinum*.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> Blinds of split reed to keep out flies.

ripening wheat radiant in the sunshine but mocking men's hopes. At one point we passed through a wooded defile guarded by an old fort perched on a crag, and cresting a hill we suddenly saw spread out before us Saugor in its wide and fertile vale. But I nearly came to grief at its gates with a bad stumble by Golden Morn—a reminder that even now there's many a possible slip between us and the Narbada.

Once more the tale all along our route was of the all-devouring rust. The most optimistic estimate is a two-anna crop; for the whole district the Additional District Magistrate here puts it at 'one-anna or zero'. There is no wheat to be had at the official price, and in the black market it costs, he said, a rupee a seer—Rs. 40 a maund. Only with the greatest difficulty has he been able to get us two maunds thirty-six seers of barley for the horses—even three maunds was impossible—and its price uncrushed is sixteen rupees a maund instead of about two before the war. The people are now having to live on millet or rice, both of which cost over ten rupees a maund even at the controlled rate, and a man is lucky if he can get 7 lb. at this rate once a week for himself and his whole family. A man we met today on his way to Saugor to get his weekly quota was having to walk twelve miles there and twelve miles back. More than ever does the peasant require honest and efficient administration.

We actually met two horsemen today, if men mounted on small ponies can be called this. One was a bania on his way to a village to lay in a stock of ber fruit, the other a butcher to buy goats for the soldiers in Saugor.

### *March 5—Saugor to Pansoria—13 miles*

We had intended halting at Saugor today, but hearing in the afternoon that the rest-house at Pansoria was available, off we went, and with what relief we shook off the Dak Bungalow's dust and flies, and inhaled the air of the open country again. Our horses' heads were turned eastwards and the sun was setting behind us, filling the ripening fields around us with light and beauty. We rode at a good pace until the deepening twilight forced us to slow down, and the last five miles we walked, the moon rising in front of us in



all the splendour of fullness, and, as we approached Pansoria, the *chhk-chhk* of the cricket was loud in our ears. It was after eight when we got here, and what luxury to have a rest-house all to ourselves again, and with nothing but one light to show that even a village was near.

*March 6—Pansoria to Garhakota—15 miles, and then 6 to Ramna*

Since Jhansi the soil has varied from grey to red, with here and there stretches of black. Today it was all black, the famous black cotton soil of Malwa and the Deccan. The country was open, but hills were never quite out of sight, flat-topped as usual, as if ridge and peak had been sliced off with a knife. The jungle forest had begun to reappear when we sighted Garhakota, and peasants waylaid us to say that last night a leopard had got away with two of their goats. But before we got there a tiny commemorative act took place. A. and I were riding together and P. had gone on in the truck. P. knew that at a certain milestone Corydon and I would complete our 2,000 kilometres. On coming to it we found three large carrots neatly set out on kitchen paper on the roadway, one for each horse, in honour of the event.

From Garhakota we left our route and came on to Ramna in the truck, tempted by a rest-house set in the heart of the forest which Wingate chose for the training of his Chindits. Five of them, all of the Liverpool Regiment, lost their lives in the process, and are buried within a stone's throw of the rest-house in graves which already need repair. Four of the five were drowned in a green river, which we forded this evening with the water not even up to the knees. When India's rivers rise, woe to those who stand in their way! And the rivers are not always of water!

High up on the farther bank is a village of aborigines (Saons sprinkled with Gonds), the first we have come across. Never, except perhaps in a hamlet of semi-nomadic Janglis,<sup>1</sup> have I seen peasants more wretchedly housed—with one small room for a family of five or more, and another even smaller for the cattle, and both so badly

<sup>1</sup> In the Western Punjab.

thatched that any heavy rain must come through, and with doorways so low that I had to creep through them on all fours. Yet within, as in the Jangli huts, a surprising cleanliness, the few brass vessels shining in the half-light like stars. In one dwelling-house I found three adults and four children living in a single room ; in another, four with one bed between them, and in a third, five with no bed at all. Yet all the women were adorned with anklet, armlet and necklace, and some of the children, too. The children were as lively as crickets, with large startling eyes, even brighter than the brass vessels. The women were equally at their ease. No question of purdah, for, like their menfolk, they have to work in forest and field for hire. The whole village, except one non-aboriginal cultivator, do this, the men earning ten or twelve annas a day, the women two annas less. Their diet is a mixture of wheat, gram and pulse eaten three times a day. In the monsoon, when work is slack, ' we eat only once '. They never touch meat—loud laughter at the bare idea—but they catch an occasional hare and looked as if they were not entirely ignorant of the time-honoured art of poaching. No spinning is done—this is not a cotton area—but each abode has grindstones set firmly in the mud floor. The village's only link with the modern world was a skeleton umbrella in one of the houses. No one bothers about education, and one woman I tested couldn't count beyond ten or say how many hours there were in the day.

On the highest point in the village there stood an enormous stack of grass, piled high for the annual bonfire in celebration of Holi, the Hindu carnival, which begins with tonight's full moon. All pluck some firebrand from the burning to take back to their homes, and in old days they would keep the fire alight, in Vestal fashion, all the year round. P. says that a hundred years ago the same rite was observed on St John's Day at his country home in Belgium. Throughout India Hindus pelt each other at Holi with a liquid the colour of pomegranate, but here they dance as well. Could we see the dance ? ' Certainly, but we shall souse you if you come.' ' We cannot afford to spoil our clothes,' we said delicately, and the Assistant Registrar, an

elderly Muslim gentleman from the U.P., who is now our mentor, put in an anxious word. 'Then we will not souse you,' said the local wag, 'but', he added gleefully, 'the women will. We can't stop *them*.' Even louder laughter at this, and the sound echoed humanly through the brutish conditions around us. Where, indeed, there is cleanliness and laughter and the children are gay, life cannot be entirely brutish.

There is feeling, too, for the mystery of creation. 'Yes,' said the wag, expressing it on the lighter side, 'we make offerings to Bhagwan—to God—but when we get so little ourselves, *He* cannot expect much; so we give Him just a pinch of grain,' and he rubbed finger and thumb together with a twinkle of his shining eyes. The more serious side was represented by a temple on the edge of the village with, in front of it, an open pavilion supported on wooden pillars and roofed with that horror—corrugated iron. Seated on the ground in the middle of it was a well-built young-looking sadhu clad entirely in white, and in front of him, in a large, round basin hollowed out of the ground, two vast logs were slowly burning, with sacred smoke and flame. Very impressive he looked sitting there alone with legs crossed, and human, too, when at one point a bright-eyed child squatted mischievously beside him, as it might have been Puck beside God the Father. He was certainly not bogus, like the many who strip and beg and mutter spells, and he had the dignified bearing of those who live apart, but the somewhat troubled expression of one who had not yet attained full liberation, the only kind of freedom he acknowledged. He answered my many questions courteously, but as one might answer a child when occupied with graver matters, and one question was sufficiently childish—'Which God do you worship?' 'How do you mean, "which God"?' he asked. 'All Gods are one, I worship the One.'

He came to this temple eighteen years ago at the age of twelve and is still only a disciple of his master, who lives at Khandwa and visits the village once a year. People come to him from many quarters, some to be healed, some to get children, some even to be cured of madness or have

an evil spirit cast out. These last he beats with the iron clappers lying at his side. All go away with ash from the sacred fire, and that, he said, was the only remedy—the remedy of faith, but faith, he added, is on the decline. So, too, are gifts. For daily bread he depends on what his neighbours bring him, and he deserves their offerings if what a woman standing by said is true—‘When the sadhu came, the bad spirits ran away’. Bad spirits, the kind that enter people’s minds, are the bane of village life, of all life indeed, and who has not felt them to be less potent when a good spirit is present? Many flags were hoisted on long poles outside the pavilion to keep them away.

*March 7—Ramna to Garhakota—6 miles*

Bamboo and birch-like teak all round us and the white-bonneted black-gloved langur whisking through their light and shade. Of the camel it is said—he can do everything but cook; of the bamboo it might be said—one can do everything with it, even cook it. It will make roof, fence and cart, basket, stick, flagstaff, and funeral pyre; it will feed cattle with its leaf, and greedy horses, too, as Golden Morn showed us one day when we stopped by the wayside; and it will heal humans with its pith. P. spent the day amidst all this forest beauty tracking deer and pig, but only the langur stayed to be seen. In the evening we walked back to Garhakota, passing by a village where Holi song and dance gave corybantic life to a river bank. ‘You must be prepared to be soused,’ said our guide to the Assistant Registrar. ‘No, no,’ he protested. ‘But you have not the right to say no,’ insisted the guide. We gave the rustic Corybants a wide berth and so escaped highly-coloured baptism. One peasant, whose solitary dwelling we passed, was not inclined to revel. A night or two ago his two ponies had been devoured by a leopard. ‘But why did you let them graze at night alone?’ we asked. ‘I had nowhere to keep them,’ he replied, and he pointed to his one-room dwelling. When we reached Garhakota, it was to learn that an even deadlier enemy was at work there: people were dying of plague. And above, the moon rose large, golden and indifferent.

*March 8—Garhakota to Damoh—21 miles*

By nine, marching has become a sweaty business, so off we went this morning soon after 5.30, early enough to hear Islam's first call to prayer echoing through the stars and the moonlit sky. I know nothing more solemn and mysterious, and till the last echo dies away one stands transfixed. There was but a wisp of light in the east, and the air was so fresh that we walked fast to keep ourselves warm. It was very different when three hours later, with nearly fifteen miles behind us, we stopped by a village to feed our horses. It was then a case of how to keep cool.

We spent an hour with one of the land-owners of the village, at first watching a woman churning in his charming courtyard and then talking to him and others in his porch. As we did so, a merryman of the village appeared with red powder and water on a shining brass tray. His intention was only too clear. 'No, no,' protested the Assistant Registrar even more emphatically than yesterday. In vain, for the day—the last and greatest of the saturnalia—had its claims. But one concession was made: the unholy liquid was not thrown at us satyr-like, but decorously, though all too decoratively, splashed on to forehead and hair, as each of us bowed Christian or Muslim head in turn. Much ablution when we got back to our horses, but that was not until we had almost forgotten how we looked.

The land-owner had one great merit: he was no absentee, as all but four of the twenty other land-owners in the village were. I asked him why he had not sunk a well with the water only thirty to forty feet down. '*Paisa nahin*—no cash' was the excuse. Like most land-owners he was in debt,<sup>1</sup> and debt is everywhere a main reason why the precious water below is not more freely tapped. Another, almost as important, is fragmentation. This land-owner did not even know how many fields he had—thirty to forty, he guessed—so scattered were they round the village.

While we were talking, still seated in his porch, a tall, infuriated peasant burst in upon us with an armful of gram—stolen, he said, from his house by one of those talking to us,

<sup>1</sup> His debt had been scaled down by a Conciliation Board from Rs. 5,000 to 2,500, payable without interest in 20 yearly instalments.

and he pointed to the merryman. The accused took fire at once and the porch resounded with angry clamour. In vain did the Assistant Registrar try to find out the rights and wrongs of the matter. Both parties spoke at once, and his questions were drowned in a jabble of contradictory assertions. When at length the storm of words a little abated, it appeared that there had certainly been theft, but only of an armful, not much more than what was given to our horses on the road the other day.<sup>1</sup> The thief, too, had only one acre against the other fellow's hundred, 'and how am I to live', he asked, 'if I don't take something from each of you?' After all, too, it was Holi, a day of do-as-you-please. The wrong was finally settled by dividing the gram between them, and well it was so, for it had all the cut and thrust of a quarrel which lasts. Ninety per cent of the village cases which come to court have as trivial an origin, and panchayats are badly needed to deal with them before they get there. Here there was none. Badly, too, did the village need a sweeper. 'Why not employ one?' I asked the land-owner. 'Who will give food to a sweeper?' was the scornful reply. The result is the dirtiest lanes I have seen since the village near Ghaziabad.<sup>2</sup>

I heard here of a new domestic industry—the making of the popular *biri*—the leaf cigarette. The tobacco is folded in the leaf of the ebony tree<sup>3</sup> and a thousand biris can be made in a day, many more indeed by those who are deft with their fingers and willing to work hard. Its popularity is comparatively recent. People like 'to play the Babu Sahib' said the land-owner, 'and to become gentlemen', and throwing out his arms with the air of a peacock spreading his tail, he puffed an imaginary cigarette. The war made it more popular than ever, a packet of *biris* slipping into field kit much more easily than either hookah or pipe and costing only eight annas a hundred (three annas before the war). Incidentally, the hookah is not smoked in the C.P., but the chilam or pipe.

Making *biris* is so remunerative and so easy that it is

<sup>1</sup> p. 266.

<sup>2</sup> p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> *Diospyros tomentosa*.

difficult to get people to work in the fields. For his hundred acres the land-owner has only the help of his two boys, and, with no one to look after his ponies, he has decided to sell them. For three years he has had no servant. How, then, he asked, could he send his boys to school? Before the war a servant could be had for twelve rupees a month with no meals to be given; now he wants at least thirty rupees.

We had left our horses outside the village under a tree by what looked like a village house but what was in fact a temple, as a flag on a tall bamboo stem outside showed. The good-looking young wife of the temple priest was washing her brass vessels in front and making them bright as the sunlight when, spying us watching her, she quickened her movements. 'Are you afraid of us?' I asked. 'Of course not,' she replied. 'Why should I be afraid of human beings?' Would that the village women of Northern India could say that today!

The brass vessels and their radiant shining are typical of Central India and recall the way all metal shines in the Odyssey. Every day as we ride along, the eye is caught by their brightness. Another lovely sight is the appearance of the saree with its gracious folds—'the beauteous scarf veiling an Indian beauty'—in place of the ghaggra and its ponderous pleated skirt. But these sights did not quite make up for the heat which had now turned the cool early morning mist along the hills into a hot milky haze. It was nearly midday when we climbed the steep bare hill on which the Circuit House stands.

Damoh is the headquarters of a Sub-Divisional Officer, who came to see me this evening.<sup>1</sup> Trouble between Hindu and Muslim had called him out to a village in the morning. The one Muslim family in the village had refused to take part in the Holi celebrations. No wonder, I thought, but till last year it had always done so and the change had led to disturbance. One more example of the Dead Sea fruit sown by the politics of yesterday and today.

<sup>1</sup> The Sub-division consists of two tehsils, and for its population of 300,000 there are only a hospital and two dispensaries, with two more dispensaries for cattle. For boys there are three High schools but nothing above a Middle school for girls.

## II—THE LAST LAP—DAMOH TO JUBBULPORE

*Sunday, March 9—Damoh to Nohta—13 miles*

We are once more in jungle country and, as we got in before the fierce midday heat, and our road lay through forest, the ride was pure pleasure—with one perfect moment when we came upon Abhana with three snow-white temples on a red-tiled hillside and twelve snow-white egrets on a blue lake below. A little farther on we met a motley company of young and old trudging along towards Abhana, and in the hands of one of the young a violin case. We couldn't pass by so unexpected an object without a question. Inside it was a viola. 'We are a drama company,' said the leader of the party; 'the boys dance and we who are grown-up, act.' Tonight at nine they are to act scenes from the Ramayana, and in time-honoured fashion the performance will go on till 1.30. Except a sadhu with a bestial face, they were all Brahmins—art and religion still hand in hand—and they were members of a U.P. family four generations of which have been roving over central India from the U.P. to the Deccan, keeping India's great epics alive.

In the evening, after a refreshing bathe in the green waters of the river below the rest-house, I went to hear what the people of Nohta had to say about themselves. As at Garhakota and Damoh, plague has got into the village, so we sat by the roadside, with a Jain cloth-dealer as the principal spokesman. He said he was a Hindu, yet he distinguished between the Jain and the Hindu temples above us. 'Yes, Hindus can enter a Jain temple as freely as any Jain,' he declared, as if this had always been so; but a further question showed that it had been so for only three years. I have always thought it a mistake to keep our clubs out here to ourselves, but in doing so were we not following the custom of the country, for the club is almost as sacred to the Anglo-Indian (old style) as the temple to the Hindu, and much more frequented, if the experience of this tour is any guide?

Though Nohta has about a thousand inhabitants and lies on the main road between Saugor and Jubbulpore, till yesterday no one had heard of Attlee's announcement of



February 20 that we are to leave India by June '48; and they only heard it then from a P.W.D. official who happened to pass this way. Progress, as change is called, makes no appeal to the people, and indeed little has been done to show them its possibilities. The nearest dispensary is at Damoh, thirteen miles away; the bamboo-worker's wife is the only midwife; there are no improved implements; scrub bulls are not castrated, and new varieties of seed are only to be had at Damoh. Yet someone present said that the new types of wheat had been much less damaged by rust. All that the village can boast of is a post office, a Co-operative society, and a primary school. The school has the merit of drawing girls as well as boys, but in the last year numbers have sunk from over a hundred to under fifty. 'Pressure (*dhant*) has been relaxed' was the excuse given at first, but the real reason is more interesting. The making of *biri* cigarettes has become so popular that, as we saw in the village near Damoh,<sup>1</sup> the boys are needed in the fields to take the place of those who worked there before.

Against all this can be set two small changes for the better: sulphate of ammonia is being applied to the paddy, and useless cattle are being sold more freely. The first is due to the Agricultural Department, the second to the rise in prices. But the long procession of underfed cattle, which shambled past us on their way homewards from the day's grazing, made one doubt whether the second had gone very far.

The stars were shining and the Great Bear standing on his tail when we, too, started homewards. The Assistant Registrar told me how only a month ago the biggest farmer of the neighbourhood had been murdered because he was setting himself up to rule the village. He was attacked one evening when alone in the fields and succumbed on the way to hospital to his seven fractures. The tale did not surprise me, for since we entered the Vindhya, the people have been of a lower type—in face, not in physique—than any we have seen, with crude features and sombre looks, which, however, an unexpected *Ram Ram*<sup>2</sup> often turns into

<sup>1</sup> p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> Compare *Grüss Gott*.

an expression of pleasure and surprise. Ever since we left Jhansi, this simple greeting, varied sometimes with *Jai Ram*,<sup>1</sup> has proved a veritable talisman of good fellowship with those we meet on the road.

*March 10—Nohda to Tejgarh—12 miles*

A. and I were riding along together this morning when our attention was caught by the sight of a small orchard, the first we have seen since Gwalior away from a town. Seeing us pause, two middle-aged men came forward to greet us. One of them, the owner of the orchard, was a Borah, as his solid gold-embroidered turban showed, and he came from Tonk in Rajputana. The other looked altogether different. 'Are you a Pathan?' asked A. He was, and he came from Peshawar; why, he did not explain, nor how he and the Borah came to join hands. Like so many Muslims in the north, and so few in these parts, he had served in the Great War and had seen Basra and 'Baghdad Shareef'.<sup>2</sup> In religion the Borah followed the head of his great trading community, 'His Holiness Muhammad Saif-ud-din', but in politics 'Jinnah Sahib'.

Yes, they had heard that the English were to leave India next year, and the Pathan was evidently pleased about it; 'but,' said the Borah, 'you won't go.' When I assured him that we would, since our 'Wazir' had said so, he replied: 'When a man makes a house how shall he leave it?' 'Yes, but when the son grows up, he wants a house to himself.'

The Pathan was so pleased with this simple reply that out came his hand to touch my arm, while the Borah said laconically: 'The son must then be fit.' Another little point that tickled the Pathan was my using the local word for ploughman. 'He knows the language of the C.P.,' he exclaimed. But, alas, one word doesn't make a language.

Eggs have been one of our many supply problems in this hen-hating country. We were therefore delighted to see fowls running about. Once a week their eggs are sold in

<sup>1</sup> Glory to God.

<sup>2</sup> Holy Baghdad.

Damoh. Yes, they could spare us two dozen, and they promised to put them on board the truck when it passed. We agreed at once to the price—three rupees or two annas each ( $2\frac{1}{2}$  annas in the town), but when the truck came—we had moved on—they charged only Rs.  $2/8$ —bless their good hearts.

We rode on, and once more it was a lovely ride, mostly through jungle forest, along a road which again and again dipped to some deep glen or stream, and when at length we came out into open country, it was to see the misty lines of yet more hills ahead and finally to reach a little whitewashed rest-house standing on a forest edge. This Vindhya country is the most attractive we have come through since the Himalayas were lost to sight. Legend tells there was once great rivalry between Himalaya and Vindhya, which ended in Vindhya being humbled to its present thousand feet or two of rock, stone and tree.

The most interesting type to be met on a tour of this kind is the educated villager. He knows the people and can tell you about them. But there are all too few of them. The spread of education, instead of enriching the village, has impoverished it, drawing away much of its enterprise and intelligence to the town. But this evening I met one who had resisted the town's lure, a matriculate who had gained the diploma of the Ayurvedic College at Agra. He practises as a doctor, and the neighbourhood is lucky to have him as the nearest dispensary is fourteen miles away. He is also the Honorary Secretary of a multi-purpose Co-operative Society, whose 400 members belong to the sixteen villages round about.

We had a look at the village first. It was well built with red-tiled houses of undressed stone (provided in abundance by the hills), clean lanes—unlike the village near Damoh<sup>1</sup> four sweepers are employed—and a good sprinkling of shady trees. When we settled down to talk, the stars had come out and on a warm evening talk never goes better than under their mellowing influence. The day's tasks are done, there is coolth after heat, body and mind are relaxed, and in the half-light barriers fall away. In this case there was

<sup>1</sup> p. 273.

the extra fillip of a table set before us laden with fruit, raisins and nuts.

We started unromantically with sulphate of ammonia. I had seen a bag of it in one of the village houses and was told that a dozen peasants had bought some. Gad, I thought, here indeed is change. How had it come about? I asked. 'Jemadars of the Agricultural Department', said the doctor, 'take it round to the cultivators. But', he added, 'they do not all use it. The man whose house you saw, he has not used it: it is lying with him.' It then came out that this was the case with six out of the twelve. The reason was clear enough: they had taken it under pressure from someone they wished to oblige or anyhow not to displease. The incident recalled a remark I heard in the N.W.F.P.: the cultivator is so harried by the ever-increasing number of petty officials who bid him do this and that, that sooner or later he will turn his back upon them all and wish them at the devil. When I mentioned this to the doctor, he said, 'Yes, it means more and more forced labour.' 'But', said the Assistant Registrar, innocently, 'Congress stopped all that last year.' Whereupon the doctor related how a leading Congressite of the neighbourhood came here on tour and got his supplies without payment in the traditional way, and when this was pointed out to him, his naive reply was—'But we are the guests of the people.'

I could well understand the incident, for it is the *begari*, as the temporary conscript is called, who brings grass for our horses and wood for our kitchen and baths, and without his services these necessities would be unprocurable. But we have at least endeavoured to give him a full wage for his time and trouble, and to pay him direct—very necessary if the amount is to reach him, but not easy, as he expects nothing and disappears as soon as his task is done. Over a hundred years ago, Kinglake pointed out that 'one of the greatest drawbacks to the pleasure of travelling in Asia is the being obliged, more or less, to make your way by bullying', even though, as he adds, 'your own lips are not soiled by all the mean words that are spoken for you',

<sup>1</sup> *Esthen*, ch. xvii.

and the French traveller, Gérard de Nerval, says much the same.<sup>1</sup> The remedy is the one indicated many weeks ago when we were up against the same difficulty in the U.P.<sup>2</sup>

Other tales were told of cultivators who, last year, were all obliged to hand over their surplus produce to Government. Some of them have still not been paid owing to a racket in which, it was alleged, a number of officials and others got a rake-off. This year arrangements have been made for prompt payment, and sale is no longer compulsory, though all sales of more than twenty seers at a time must be made to a Government agent. What still pinches poor Periwinkle's foot is the way the slender sugar ration is distributed in the village. The quota is handed over to the headman, and he of course helps himself and his more influential neighbours first, and if there is not enough to go round, the poorest have to do without. If only all were like the Chief of the aboriginal Saonrs, who 'never took his food until he had ascertained that all the people in the village had had theirs'!<sup>3</sup>

'What does the village need most?' I asked the doctor. The abolition of forced labour, he said, and after that good seed. This can only be got with difficulty; yet on the road today we were told once more that 'Farm seed' stood up to rust much better than local varieties. The growing of vegetables is being started, though there are no wells; yet at Nohta yesterday this was the excuse for not growing them! There is even talk of poultry. Both ideas come from the doctor, and it is men like him who are the pioneers of progress in the village.

Golden Morn is dead lame—that was the news when I got back. Not very pleasant hearing with still three marches to the Narbada. And what is the reason, we wonder? This morning, to put a little pep into him, I kept him back and he got into a fever of excitement at the sight of his beloved Dumpling going on ahead. Had he damaged himself in the pursuit that followed, or is it only a bite? Pray heaven it's the latter.

<sup>1</sup> *Voyage en Orient*, ch. viii.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> *Damoh Dt. Gazetteer*, 1906, p. 72.

*March 11—Tejgarh to Tendukhera—14 miles*

It looks like a bite, for he is no longer lame, only stiff, and the swelling, thanks to compresses, is down a bit. So off we went, leaving him to follow at a walk, but when we looked back he was struggling with the groom to come along too.

The country today, as attractive as ever with its endless lines of wooded hills, had the charm of solitude, broken only by an occasional bullock cart laden with dry grass, and a still more occasional cyclist. The road switched up and down the hills, through thick forest, which now and then opened into green park-like country, dominated by the stone-built houses of red-tiled villages spread out at ease, not clustered and cluttered together as so often in the Punjab and U.P.

As we were walking the last mile or two into Tendukhera—the village of the *tendu*, the ebony tree—we fell in with two Qureshi Muslims on bicycles. They, too, were bound for Tendukhera, to work for a Muslim contractor. ‘ Is he a good master ? ’ I asked. ‘ Much he cares for us. Two days’ work and nothing for the next—we can all die, it won’t matter,’ was the bitter reply. They were loud in their complaint against Congress. It was the Sahib they wanted—from him alone could a poor man get justice. ‘ When you go ’—they had heard of June ’48—‘ no one will care what happens to us. There will only be injustice. We get nothing since Congress came in.’

‘ Do you want Pakistan ? ’

‘ Pakistan ? What good is that to us ?—we want oil, cloth, sugar, wheat. And we want justice—that is all.’ More, alas, than any Government can supply at present, but woe to any Government that does not supply them sooner or later !

This evening we visited a village which more than ever made one think of the town with disgust. The red-tiled houses were comfortably spaced ; their little courtyards immaculately clean and divided for man and beast by mud-plastered platform and seat ; their doorways adorned with peacock and horseman or other rustic device in relief ; within, implement, utensil and bedding each in its place,

and the brass vessels dazzling the eye with their brightness ; the cattle, a little apart in a shed of their own, and in the centre of the village a superb pipal tree, already old when our seventy-year-old Brahmin spokesman was but a boy. 'May its branches be cut ?' I asked. 'Only for the Baba's elephant' was the mysterious reply. The Baba proved to be a Guru who lives in holy Ayodhya 300 miles to the north. He comes here from time to time on his elephant with his 'ten-five' disciples and a train of sadhus to collect the modest offerings of his followers, four annas from this man, a rupee from that, from each according to his means. Twenty-four pounds of rice, with ghi to match, are given to the guru and his train, and thirty pounds of paddy to the elephant. 'And what does the guru do for you in return ?' I asked.

'He gives us his blessing and we are happy.'

Great is the effort needed to get a village to pave a lane, fill up a stagnant pond, or contribute to hospital or school, but when the appeal is for religion—for temple, gurdwara or mosque—out come the hard-earned rupees. Here a temple was being built at a cost of seven or eight hundred rupees. 'Twelve annas is already done,' said the Brahmin with pride, pointing to a large square box as ugly as a police post.

Though the village is only a mile from a metalled highway, I could find no sign of change. At one end of the social pyramid the Brahmin's feet are touched in reverence, at the other end untouchable may only touch untouchable. 'Do Brahmins plough ?' I asked, remembering one of India's most curious taboos. 'No, no,' he replied, lowering his voice as if I had asked a most unsuitable question. Hearing that the village not only touched his feet but brought him offerings, I said : 'You've told us what the village does for you, what do you do for the village ?' He said he read them the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and recited prayers for them and had got them to build the temple. More than what many landlords do for their tenants. Prosperity and poverty lived side by side in the village, with fine mansions for the Brahmins and but a tiny room and courtyard for the aboriginal Gond, room and

courtyard, however, so well kept and the surroundings so open and well treed that, though there was obvious need, there was no squalor or decay, and both women and children looked tolerably healthy and cheerful. No one had heard of our 'quit India' decision, and all they knew of the war was that it had been between England and Germany and that England had won.

On my way back I fell in with a village schoolmaster. He confirmed that the making of *biris* is keeping boys from school.<sup>1</sup> At the moment there are very few at all at school, as most of the masters are on strike. And can one blame them with their scrap of pay? Here was the headmaster of a primary school, 49 years old and getting only 44 rupees a month, not even one rupee a year of his age, while his wretched assistant gets only 26 rupees—pedagogue once more paid less than ploughman. And the sorry jest is that both sums include a 'dearness of living allowance'!

*March 12—Tendukhera to Patan—14 miles*

This is the perfect life—called at five, off before six, with our faces, today at least, towards the dawn, three hours or more on the road, a keen appetite for breakfast on arrival, and then the rest of the long day in a cool rest-house with leisure to write, read and sleep, and finally at sundown out to some village for a walk and a crack with the peasant. In today's ride there was an exciting moment when the Vindhya fell away sharply in cliff, promontory and bay, and we saw below us a wide plain, as it might have been the sea, stretching away to the Narbada, still unseen but no longer impossibly far. Down we came, from red earth to black, from forest to field and grove, from grey ape and whisking tails to obscene monkey and squeaking parrot.

But I must go back for a moment to last night. My bed was in the verandah and light and dark danced before me as the lightning flashed and fled or scribbled madly across the sky. Thunder rumbled in the distance, and leaves ran crackling across the grass. Would the storm pass us by? The answer came with the wind bursting out of the forest, leaping across the plain and crashing through the rest-house

<sup>1</sup> See p. 276.



trees in a tornado of thunder-claps. All was orgy and panic—until the rain fell and the earth answered with its sweetest savour.

This evening we visited a village on the banks of the Hiran, which runs like a moat below the fortress wall of the Vindhya. In the Vindhya the villages are well built and well filled, but here once more we were in an atmosphere of dilapidation and decay. Forty or fifty years ago landlord and tenant quarrelled and away went many of the tenants, leaving their houses to rack and ruin. There were two small village banks, but in the C.P., as too often in the U.P., these societies have little life of their own. As we sat talking, men turned up from a day's shopping in Patan's weekly market. One had bought wheat at  $1\frac{1}{2}$  seers to the rupee, about Rs. 27 a maund, and gur at forty rupees a maund, both of course in the black market, and also 125 *biris*. The Brahmins, who before never smoked even the pipe, have now taken to the *biri*, and one who had succumbed to temptation admitted it was bad for health, but '*adat pargya*—it has become a habit'.

*Thursday, March 13—Patan to the Marble Rocks—16 miles*

The great, the unbelievable day has come—the day that has haunted me like a dream ever since years ago A. said, 'Why not ride across India?' Even the war that took me West could not quite efface it from the mind, and when eighteen months ago chance brought me back to India, the dream rose again before me, and this time took shape. So out we came in October to start as far north as we could, and get as far south. How far would this be? Who could say, for what might not happen to one or other of us? or even to horse and truck? In the very first week the truck nearly skidded into a canal and I was caught, horse and all, in a quicksand of mud. In the weeks that followed, thrice did a horse nearly bring me to the ground, and at Delhi two of the three had to be sent back, and of the five we have had, only one has done the whole course; and who, seeing Corydon at Peshawar all rib and bone, could have guessed it would be he!

Called at five, we set out at six—Golden Morn once more at our service—with the dawn breaking quietly on our left and a half-moon above, and after many days there was dew on the ground. Six miles on, having to leave the metalled road to 'Jub', we stopped to inquire the way. As usual I was asked where I came from. When I said from Peshawar my questioner gravely observed: 'You are very old and very wise,' and pointing to P., who looked the very picture of his 28 years, he asked: 'Is this your brother?'

We turned southwards on to what the Survey of India map called a cart track—actually two deep ruts divided by a bank of earth and grass. The next six or seven miles took us cross-country, sometimes creeping jerkily along Survey of India 'camel tracks', embankments that would have been sheer tight-rope for a camel, sometimes trotting along a footpath winding through the shrivelled wheat, and once cantering gloriously along a real and perfect track. But, however slow our progress and crooked our way, it was exhilarating, after these many days of metalled roads, to be threading our way once more through village and field. The villages, like yesterday's, were all touched with dilapidation and decay and showed little sign of other change. Yet curiously I came upon my first hand-threshing 'mishin', as its owner called it. He was a Brahmin and owned half the village, and as he came down the narrow lane, red from top to toe with Holi's unholy water, I thought I saw a satyr fresh from the wine-vat. Once more no change in the respect paid to Brahmins, or in the disrespect paid to untouchables. But how fine are the lines drawn by India's most sensitive sensibilities. Sweeper and tanner are both untouchable, and neither might set foot on the raised verandah where we were sitting, but whereas the tanner might mount the verandah steps, the sweeper must wait below.

The Brahmin, as his appearance suggested, had no inhibition about ploughing and, with the help of his ploughmen (paid 20 to 35 rupees a month, according to work and age), employs no less than sixteen ploughs. It takes eight men to keep the threshing machine going all day, but 100 maunds can be threshed in a day. During the war

he borrowed Rs. 16,000 from a money-lender to buy land and was charged only 10½ instead of the usual 24 per cent, a rate he justified, for he repaid the whole sum in two years. Others could borrow as cheaply were they equally reliable. On hearing that the English were leaving India in June '48—this was news to him—he exclaimed: 'You have been leaving it ever since '42. I do not believe you will leave it now.—Nor should you,' he added. 'Here is this rust: what can the Congress do? It is for the Sirkar<sup>1</sup> to help.' Yet he had voted for Congress, or, as he put it, 'for those who have become our Ministers'. Of Gandhi all he would say was that he was great because he was Congress's leader. Of the C.P. Ministers he knew nothing. Like yesterday's Brahmin, he showed a touch of humour about smoking. He had never smoked the pipe; but the *biri*—that was different. 'Yes, it is bad for health.'

'Why, then, do you smoke it?' asked the moralist.

'The way of the world,' he replied with a disarming laugh.

It is odd how little the people we have met since Agra know about Gandhi and what is happening round them. The headman of a village only ten miles from Jubbulpore came to see me this afternoon with two of his tenants, each carrying a bicycle pump. One like himself was a Rajput, the other a Brahmin, and all they could say about Gandhi was—they did not know whether he was good or bad, but he must be a big man because he was called Mahatma. None of them had heard of Attlee's statement, and the Assistant Registrar says this ignorance of what's happening outside is typical of the village. Perhaps the most curious example of it was the case of a Punjabi we met this morning by chance. I wanted to show P. a potter at work—the loveliest of all village sights—and was asking where he lived when a tall lean man addressed me in English. He was a Punjab Muslim from Sialkot who had come to these parts forty years ago to sell piecegoods and had settled down to farm. He had not heard a word of the tragic doings in the Punjab during the last ten days.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Government, i.e. the British Government.

<sup>2</sup> Grave disturbances broke out early in March.

The Punjabis are an extraordinary people. Within an hour of meeting the Muslim from Sialkot I came upon a Brahmin from Ferozepore, who has become a quarry contractor here. Hearing this, I couldn't help exclaiming, amid general laughter: 'These Punjabis take possession of every country—mine, too,' I added, remembering the pedlar I once met near Dunkeld going his rounds on a bicycle laden with piecegoods, and whose father had migrated from Multan to Peru.<sup>1</sup>

But this was after the great climax. We were back on the metalled road and came to a sharp descent, just below the top of which was a stone astonishingly inscribed 'H.F.L.,<sup>2</sup> 22-9-26, Nerbudda<sup>3</sup> River': astonishing, because no river was yet in sight and we were still 150 feet or more above it.

Down we went by a long winding cutting in the hillside when, on turning a corner, a blue and silvery gleam appeared far away to the right. Ten minutes later, at 10.30, we were watering our horses in the sacred stream and the dream was fulfilled. Unmoved, the horses drank deep.

*March 14—Bheraghat, as the village by the Marble Rocks is called—Halt*

Many and varied have been the sounds we have heard on our trek, but none so satisfying as the unceasing melody of the Narbada's green and shallow stream flowing over the rocks 169 feet<sup>4</sup> below us. This is my eighty-eighth abode since we left Peshawar, and it is the finest, standing on a high cliff with the Narbada in a wide and deep ravine at its feet. 'Her bed is India, there she lies a pearl.' Yesterday evening we walked to where it plunges into the long winding gorge of the Marble Rocks, and we all bathed above the fall in its cool swift water, and, as a pilgrim should, I took the names of India's seven sacred rivers—Sindhu, or Indus, the father of rivers, crossed 3½ months ago; Saraswati, no longer visible; Yamuna, crossed in January; Gangaji, seen at

<sup>1</sup> Four days later, passing through Seoni in the truck, we stopped to make some inquiry and found ourselves talking to a Sikh from Amritsar, and the first stranger I happened to speak to on landing at Liverpool was also a Punjabi.

<sup>2</sup> High flood level.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.D. spelling.

<sup>4</sup> *Jubbulpore Dt. Gazetteer*, p. 336.

Hardwar ; Narbada ; and beyond it, Kristna and Godaveri. When we got back, we found that Baldeo, too, had bathed. 'Now are you clean ?' asked A., and she used the word '*pak*', which touches the spirit as much as the body. 'Who is clean ?' retorted Baldeo scornfully. '*Insan ganda bai*—man is foul.' Pascal himself could not have said it more expressively.

This morning we explored the gorge itself in a boat, and it is a remarkable sight. Cliffs of white marble a hundred feet high rose like icebergs on either side, cracked and split into buttress and boulder, completely submerged when the river rises in its strength, but today towering above us in a dazzling whiteness. A sadhu only twenty years old had settled himself with a few plants on a rock jutting out into the stream. But, however well he may overcome nature within, the day will come when he will have to give way to nature without and either leave or drown. The guardian of the gorge is not the holy man but the honey-bee. We saw many thousand clustered together under a cliff, and so formidable is their attack that to disturb them is almost certain death.<sup>1</sup>

We had with us not only the Muslim Assistant Registrar, but also a youngish Brahmin from Maharastra in the Deccan. He was all for the liquidation of caste. With its many dividing barriers, he said it was India's greatest handicap, but the older generation still holds strongly to tradition. When they have gone, there will be a tremendous change. Meanwhile, widow remarriage, impossible for a traditionalist, is not infrequent amongst the Brahmins of the Deccan, who, he claimed, are the most advanced of all Brahmins. He himself would not mind his son marrying out of his caste, but the elders of his family would not allow it. An educated Mahratta in the late thirties, whom we met a few days ago, went even further and said that he would not mind his daughter, still however only a child, marrying a Muslim if the marriage were otherwise suitable. In one respect he was typical of the younger Hindu intelligentsia, for he had, he said, 'only an academic interest' in religion and had not been to a temple for twenty years.

<sup>1</sup> See *Di. Gazetteer*, p. 334.

This talk about Hinduism brought back to my mind the little whitewashed memorial by the roadside near Gurgaon<sup>1</sup> and I asked whether suttee ever occurred now. The Brahmin said that last year when a young goldsmith of 22 died, his 19-year-old wife accompanied his body to the burning ghat, and when the pyre was ablaze she suddenly threw herself into the flames. She was dragged out and taken to hospital but died there. This kind of love is no monopoly of women. He related how one evening two years ago a clerk came back from office to find his wife had died of heart failure, and he himself died an hour later.

Hinduism, like all great religions, has many aspects. One of the less attractive, as I have already had occasion to note, is the bogus sadhu. There was one squatting in all the odour of sanctity on a platform of the temple near the rest-house. Everything about him was on traditional lines—the half-naked body, the cross-legged position with feet on thighs, the matted hair, the rosary round the neck, and the little brass begging bowl in front. But his sour, sensual, sullen face betrayed him, and still more the one word ‘baksheesh’ when the camera had done its work.

I have been told more than once by devout Hindus that to the peasant the Lingam, which one sees everywhere in Siva’s shrines and under village trees, is nothing but a symbol of Shiva’s might, and the young Brahmin said the same this evening when we visited a village and saw one with its Parvati counterpart under a tree. But when we asked a peasant what it meant to him, his very direct reply showed that it meant exactly what it displayed.

It was a small village two miles away up the Narbada, and we settled down in front of the house of a well-to-do peasant for a last gossip. ‘What do you fear most?’ I asked my host. ‘Bhagwan—God,’ was the not very original answer. ‘And after that?’ ‘Government.’ He had in his house two small framed pictures of ‘Nethaji’—Subhas Chandra Bose—which he had bought in Jubbulpore for three annas each. One showed this popular champion seated banner in hand on a charger—a St George without the dragon—and in the other he stood full length against

<sup>1</sup> p. 182.

a map of India, with Gandhi looking down on him quizzically from one corner and Nehru from the other. The map conveyed nothing to him and as I was explaining it, a young man of 26 appeared, clad entirely in white ; better fed, too, as well as better clothed than those around us. He was the owner of eighty acres, which he cultivated with four ploughs, and he had read up to the seventh class. According to village standards he was an educated man, and showed it by taking in a vernacular newspaper. This had told him of Attlee's statement.

'Did it give you pleasure ?' I asked.

'Great pleasure. *But* we shall never have freedom without unity. Indians must first leave their bad habits and be poured into a single mould. If we have no unity, the English will not go.'

'But they are going in any case.'

'Then they will have to come back.'

This unexpected reply came from no die-hard. Though not of the Congress 'hot wing',<sup>1</sup> he was in favour of land being divided up and, like the Socialist land-owner near Meerut,<sup>1</sup> he was willing to pool his own land provided others did the same. All he wanted was twelve acres to live on.

I walked back under the stars with the Assistant Registrar, whom I have mentioned more than once but never as he deserved. Ever since we left Saugor, he has been our faithful and most helpful companion, not riding with us—the Punjab is the only province where that may still happen—but always at hand at the end of each march with information and assistance. He has one quality which distinguishes him from almost everyone else I have met on this tour. He wanted to know nearly as much from me as I did from him. Amongst those whose business it is to help the peasant the missionary spirit is rare enough, but even rarer is the inquisitive spirit, the spirit which, thirsty for knowledge but conscious of ignorance, gains all it can from those it meets. My friend was one of these and served me in my own kind, as he told me when the mischief was done, by writing down all the silly things I have said to him about

<sup>1</sup> See p. 159.

Co-operation. To this keenness he added the gentleness and refinement that distinguish the best type of Muslim in the U.P., his home.

And so to bed, and once more to sleep 'dreaming by night under the open sky', and waking here, with the sound of the Narbada below, one might almost cry 'this is the gate of Heaven'.

*March 15—Bheraghat to Jubbulpore—11 miles*

With an extra pat and with mixed feelings within, I mounted Golden Morn for my eighty-fifth and last march. A. was on Dumpling and P. on Corydon. Our way took us through a beautifully wooded country, at first high up above the Narbada, then from village to village by paths smooth enough for an occasional hand-gallop. There came a moment when Corydon suddenly gave a great buck and up went P.'s thirteen stone into the air like a pancake, but down he came firmly into the saddle with only one stirrup lost, and considering how both started at Peshawar, A. and I thought the affair highly creditable to both parties!

Many who should know better speak of the Indian village as if, within and without, it were nothing but a dunghill. There are many such, no doubt, but nothing could be farther from the truth with most of those we have seen on this tour. This was the case with one we passed today. Its trees and red-tiled houses were enchantingly mirrored in the little lake on its edge, and close by a family of three—man, wife and child—were making *biris* in the clean open verandah which almost every house about here has. The child was snipping the ebony leaves into shape, and father and mother were folding them deftly round the tobacco, and sitting there in comfort and shade they earn three or four rupees a day. Who would not prefer this to the muck and sweat of tilling the 'dungy earth'? But it is a threat to the agricultural economy of the tract.

Our route has taken us through many towns—Ambala, Delhi, Agra, Gwalior, Jhansi to name but a few, but to none is the approach so attractive as to Jubbulpore, the City of Hills (Jubbul). The hills are temple-crowned, and at their feet the road winds past grassy lawns and radiant



tanks. But on reaching the Circuit House, once more we found it full, and it was some time before we could get into the rooms reserved for us.

*November 25 to March 15—Peshawar to Jubbulpore*

Adding it all up, for horse and rider the distance covered by road comes to exactly 1,400 miles,<sup>1</sup> all but four<sup>2</sup> of which I have ridden (or walked). It would have been many miles shorter had we taken the dull direct route the whole way, but we have turned this way and that, starting indeed northwards and at one time or another riding in all 'the eight directions', saving only the north-west. For the curious I may note that the 85 marches average  $16\frac{1}{2}$  miles each, with 32 for the longest and 4 for the shortest. On 22 days we did not march.

*March 17*

Yesterday with heavy hearts we entrained the three horses in a cattle truck (fitted with breast bars and trough), since no horse-box could be had for three or four weeks, and we loaded it with grain and grass—gur too was not forgotten—for a possible eight-day journey back to the north, Golden Morn and Dumpling being bound for Saharanpur and Corydon for well-earned rest in the stable of a friend at Agra. We bade them farewell after dinner, but this morning I could not resist a last look, and at 5.45 I saw them borne slowly out of the station, Golden Morn's white face looking out through the half-open door into the darkness.

<sup>1</sup> The visits to villages off our route done on horse or foot on January 5, 7 and 16, February 7, March 1, 6, 7 and 14 are not included. These would add another 44 miles. Nor have I included the six miles done by truck to Ramna (also off our route) on March 6.

<sup>2</sup> Three out of Gurdaspur (p. 91), and one into Morena (p. 223).

## EPILOGUE

*April 8—New Delhi*

This morning I had a talk with Mahatma Gandhi, the first I have ever had of any length. The hour appointed was 6 a.m., and the place the sweepers' colony where he is staying, four miles away. By six I was sitting waiting for him outside a large closed doorway. I hadn't to wait long. The doors opened and out came the small familiar figure leaning gently on the arm of a very old friend, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.<sup>1</sup> Hands were raised in Hindu greeting, palm against palm, and a firm English handshake followed.

'So you have been riding 1,400 miles,' he said; 'but walking is best,' he added with a smile. He had been walking in Eastern Bengal and his longest walk was six miles—remarkable enough at 78—but in South Africa, he said, he had once done 55 miles, starting from Johannesburg and walking day and night. We were now pacing slowly up and down a grassy enclosure, watched by a number of curious spectators, to whom, however, he paid not the slightest attention. Amrit Kaur was on his right and he leant on her arm throughout. I was on his left and had to stoop to hear him, as he is far from tall and spoke in a low voice with a slight lisp, the words flowing out in gentle fall over a flexible lower lip. His hands had not the beauty of so many Indian hands, but his left, which was almost never still, was full of character, moving up and down or thrust forward to emphasize word or phrase. His feet were shod with sandals and, as I had to stoop, my eye was repeatedly caught by their graceful well-shaped toes. His head and face, being rarely turned towards me, I saw mainly in profile. The striking feature of the head was the way it rose from the forehead to the back and then fell almost straight to the neck, with a large attentive ear prominent on either side. His manner was simple and friendly and he laughed easily, so from the start I felt at my ease.

<sup>1</sup> Now Minister of Health in the new Government of India.

I had not sought for the interview and had indeed never thought of it as possible. But when a mutual friend arranged it, I naturally seized the opportunity of meeting the great protagonist of the Indian peasant, especially as his views on peasant problems had long appealed to me. Throughout the forty minutes he kindly gave me, our talk was entirely about the village. It began with a question about the peasants of Eastern Bengal, amongst whom he had been walking. Were they very different, I asked, from those of the C.P. amongst whom he lives? Many of the former, he said, were of a criminal type, but he agreed that their villages and houses had beauty. Emphasizing their poverty, he said that jute had brought great wealth to those that dealt in it but not to those who grew it. He agreed sadly that exploitation was India's greatest curse and did not contradict me when I said that barely 10 per cent of those who had influence or authority used it for the public good.

What, I now asked, was the greatest change he had seen in the village during his lifetime? The appearance of the power-mill, he replied, for grinding corn and pressing oilseed. Grinding at home had been given up, to the disadvantage, he agreed, of the peasant's diet. What he regretted most was the giving up of spinning. Hearing that this was still common in the Punjab, he said that was why he had always regarded the Punjab as the best field for his ideas. Continuing, he deplored the spread of the gambling spirit, which had infected the remotest villages—I have not come across this—and he considered the growth of the acquisitive spirit a serious change for the worse. He spoke even more critically, in fact with horror, of the influence of the cinema. He did not agree that comparatively few visit it from villages at any distance from a town.

No change for the better having been mentioned, I inquired what he would put on the asset side. 'A very difficult question to answer,' he said, and after a pause he asked, 'What would you put?' I suggested an increase in self-respect, a greater outspokenness, and less fear of authority. 'Yes,' he said, 'but I was too modest to mention

these as in great part they are due to me'—a claim that no one probably would dispute.<sup>1</sup> The change, I thought, cut both ways: authority was declining, and that might have serious consequences; there was, indeed, considerable fear abroad. But he did not take up the point, and that was the nearest we got to politics. I added that Brahmin and mother-in-law were also affected. He declared that the Brahmin's authority had everywhere disappeared, but there I could not agree.<sup>2</sup> Through the mother-in-law we got on to the family and the great increase in the population, which I suggested was the root cause of the poverty of the people. But it was perhaps too big a question for so early an hour, and it was allowed to drop almost at once. In talking of the condition of the village, he seemed surprised when I remarked that many of those I had visited were reasonably clean and that the houses were often spotless. 'Many Anglo-Indians', he said, 'have told me that the Indian village was as clean as the Western. Would you say the same?' But again the subject was not pursued.

I now asked him, 'What do you consider the village's greatest need?'

'A return to simplicity,' was the immediate reply.

'But nowadays can one return to anything past?'

'There is the reversion to type.'

'Apart from that,' I persisted, 'what does the village need most? Some say education, some health, others roads. What would you say?'

'Sanitation and hygiene, and in hygiene I include mental hygiene.' I thought that no improvement was possible unless people could understand its importance, and how was that possible without education? 'Yes,' he replied, 'and that's why I include mental hygiene.'

To my next question—how is one to change village life for the better?—his answer was—by basic education. He started it in his village of Sevagram and thought at first that it would only be able to pay for the schoolmaster, but what was made sold so well in the village (not in the town) that it paid for other current expenses as well. Thanks to

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> cf. p. 329.

basic education and to the many who had come to Sevagram to see him, the villagers were now prosperous, as shown by their smiling faces. He admitted, however, that basic education had made but little headway elsewhere.

We both agreed, when I raised the point, that religion was very necessary to the peasant and that he was badly served by both mullah and priest. Had this always been so ? I asked. For as long as could be known, he said. My last question was about panchayats. He thought they were essential to village life but on the whole they were not doing their job. We had no time to discuss this, as we had already turned towards the gate leading to his abode.

And then I blundered. Would he perhaps allow me to photograph him ? I asked. 'No, no,' he said emphatically ; 'there are far too many photographers.' I could but agree and said they were a curse. 'Well, then,' he said, with all the charm of his whimsical humour, 'if you want to be part of a curse, you can take a photograph.' We were now back at the doorway, and with mutual compliment and a final folding of the hands, palm to palm, we parted and he disappeared with Amrit Kaur through the doorway.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The interview was recorded immediately on my return.

# Part Three

## IMPRESSIONS AND REFLECTIONS<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Based mainly on chs. I to X (figures in brackets in the text supply page references), but also on my unabridged diary.



## Chapter XI

### POLITICS

‘The farther one travels’, says Lao Tzu, ‘the less one knows,’ and certainly after riding these 1,400 miles, I felt how little I still knew of India’s village life. I had ridden too fast for detailed study, too slow to traverse even half the long road from north to south of the great peninsula. What follows, therefore, is only a bird’s eye view of a vast and varied scene. If it has any value, it will be because the villages we visited and those we talked to were largely a matter of chance ; and statisticians say that, when selection is left to chance, a small percentage will serve as well as a large to gauge the whole.

My inquiries covered three important aspects of village life—politics, administration, and change. I shall deal with each in turn, and with politics first.

Before the war politics touched only an occasional village, and for the most part Hindu, Muslim and Sikh lived together as neighbours should. The one serious source of friction was economic—dividing landlord and tenant, trader and cultivator, money-lender and peasant. The peasant might be Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, but lender and trader were nearly always Hindu or Sikh ; and where, as north and west of Lahore, the peasant was generally a Muslim and nearly always illiterate, there were dangerous possibilities. With the intensive propaganda which accompanied the elections of 1945-6, politics burst into the village, setting Muslim against non-Muslim, and giving both a new and exciting word—freedom.

The word echoed all along our route from the Himalayas to the Narbada, vibrant but discordant on the Frontier, where Muslim opposed Muslim, strong but questioning in the Punjab, where Muslim faced Hindu and Sikh, more decided in the U.P., where the Hindu was dominant, thin and wavering in Bundelkhand and the Central Provinces, where the crust of ages was still unbroken, and present even



in the States we rode through, though, outside the towns, the merest whisper. 'We are still slaves: we have only got to freedom's door,' said a Congress Pathan at my first village meeting (15). And at my last, over a thousand miles away, freedom was still the theme, but there a young Hindu land-owner, looking further than the Pathan, said: 'We shall never have freedom without unity' and, socialist though he was, he added the surprising remark that if unity was lacking, the English would have to come back (290).

But what did the peasant mean when he said he wanted freedom? For, 'after all,' as an educated young Sikh remarked, 'people are free now: they can go where they like, trade as they like, farm as they like, marry as they like' (105). With most it was merely a political shibboleth winged with the suggestion of a golden age, in which, to quote the different variations, there would be fewer taxes, perhaps none at all, no more working for wages, no more restrictions, or, even more comprehensively, no trouble of any kind. As one village headman put it, 'we shall graze our cattle in the forest, take what wood we want, and have more milk and vegetables' (230). To the soldiers back from foreign service it was the promise of a higher status, a status enjoyed by all the nations they had helped to defeat. 'We had great sorrow,' said a Frontier Muslim, 'because we were not free like the French and the Germans' (28). To few did it represent an opportunity for development. To the question, what will you do when you are free which you cannot do at present, there were usually only such stock and slightly ominous replies as 'we shall make pistols, guns, aeroplanes, motors, clothes' (15). One or two idealists suggested dividing up the land equally, and an educated Muslim land-owner on the banks of the Indus declared they would start panchayats and consolidate their holdings, incidentally two measures introduced into the Punjab over twenty years ago. The most novel answer was that of a Sikh—'we will raise the question of birth-control' (99). But more often there was no answer at all, or merely, as with the Congress Pathans of Shewa, 'our leaders will tell us' (16).

But if few had any clear idea what they would do with

their freedom, some at least realized its peril. ‘If Congress gets power we shall have to fight it’ said a Frontier Muslim; and he added that Muslim and Sikh were getting all the rifles they could (29). Another was even more explicit. ‘If the English leave, both Hindus and Muslims will die fighting with each other’ (31). In the Punjab, where the presence of the Sikh increased the tension and tangle of the communal problem, a young Sikh merchant remarked bitterly: ‘Freedom is ruin; Pakistan is *kabaristan*—a graveyard.’ And a hundred miles farther south, near Lyallpur, a Sikh land-owner of 87, too old one would have thought to bother much about the future, begged almost with tears that the English should not leave. ‘We are but cattle; you understand Government, we don’t. . . . *If you go we shall kill each other*’ (78). The same day a comparatively young Muslim official from the north said much the same thing, and a Belgian Father, who knew the Lyallpur colony well, told us there was ‘seething unrest’ amongst the colonists.

Farther south, across the line which now divides India and Pakistan, we entered a predominantly Sikh tract, and there the general feeling was, ‘We are in bonds, and when we are free, we can do what we like’ (98). Yet it was a young Sikh Captain on leave who said there would certainly be civil war.

In the United Provinces, as the atmosphere became more Hindu it became less tense, and the hardships and iniquities of the control system were uppermost, but not long before several hundred Muslims had been killed a little to the east of our route. Re-entering the Punjab south of Delhi, once more I heard talk of civil war. So far indeed as the Punjab and the Frontier Province were concerned, Mr Churchill was not far wrong when in December 1946 he spoke of ‘the millions . . . of humble folk who now stand in jeopardy, bewilderment and fear’ (62).

The intelligentsia were even more alarming than the peasant. If freedom were to cost 100,000 lives, said a Hindu of standing, most thought it would not be too big a price to pay. Few I met were as explicit as that, but nearly all expected civil war or anarchy. As far back as the

winter of 1945-6, when I toured India on an official mission, the words crept sooner or later into almost every political discussion. But now it was sooner rather than later, so much so that on my return to England (in May), all I could say to those who asked what would happen in India was—the pessimists say anarchy, the optimists civil war.

As already explained in the Introduction, the root cause of the tension was the fear of domination, fanned as between Muslim and Hindu by persistent propaganda, and as between Muslim and Sikh by the indifference shown to the Sikhs' claims by both Congress and League. The Hindus will 'take away our land' was said to us when we got to the Punjab, and in Lyallpur's progressive colony a young man observed: 'We all want freedom, but we don't want to exchange slavery to the English for slavery to the Hindu' (83). There was no great exaggeration in the remark of an intelligent Muslim Rajput who said, 'the Muslim's only idea of politics is to defend himself against the Hindu' (118). Certainly at that stage Pakistan was a battle-cry pointing rather to a new Jerusalem than to any definite territory. As to the Sikhs, they could not make up their minds whether to turn to Congress and run the risk of being submerged in the 250 million Hindus, or to the Muslims with the risk of permanent subjection in a country where once they ruled. They were sore, too, at the way the Cabinet Delegation had, as they thought, ignored their claims. 'We have been thrown into the pit,' said a young Sikh bitterly (197).

If only propaganda had not poisoned the air with hatred and distrust, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh could have continued to live happily together in the village, as they had done for over a hundred years, not inter-dining or inter-marrying, but sharing in each other's occasions of joy or sorrow, sometimes even seeking spell or healing at each other's shrines. We met Muslims who for generations had had their genealogies kept and horoscopes cast by Brahmins, and passed villages owned by Muslim and Sikh, or by Hindu and Muslim, sprung from a common ancestor, and we even came across one village where Hindu, Muslim and Sikh were of the same tribe. Without neighbourliness there

can be no comfort in village life, but, alas, propaganda with its ghastly brood—mutilation, massacre and rape—has turned Mr Jinnah’s two-nation creed in the village from a theory into a bloody fact.

Many, seeing the horizon darkening, wished the English to stay. ‘You should not give the reins to others’ said a Frontier veteran; ‘the English understand Government; surrender it and there will be disturbance’ (18). So, too, a Muslim land-owner in Hazara: ‘The British must remain. As long as they are at the centre Government will be strong: with Congress there it will not be strong’ (29). Thrice in the Punjab—once in the north and once in both centre and south—we were told that the English should stay for many years. ‘We do not suffer from their Raj,’ said the last; ‘from Gandhi’s Raj there must be injury’ (194). He had reason to fear; terrible injury has come to the people of his district (Gurgaon), though certainly not from Mr Gandhi, who gave his life that Hindu and Muslim might live together at peace. Yet it was Mr Gandhi who once wrote: ‘Votary as I am of non-violence, if I was given a choice between being a helpless witness to chaos and perpetual slavery, I should unhesitatingly say that I would far rather be witness to chaos in India, I would far rather be witness to Hindus and Mussalmans doing one another to death than that I should daily witness our gilded slavery.’ But that was eighteen years ago, when to many who distrusted British policy ‘perpetual slavery’ seemed a possibility.

Amongst those who wanted us to stay were both young and old, rich and poor, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. One of them was an elderly Sikh merchant in the Punjab who said prophetically that if the British went, ‘we shall have to leave and go elsewhere’ (51); and it was his son who made the grim remark that Pakistan would be a graveyard. ‘You must not leave us’ was the burden of a chance encounter on the road with a Brahmin officer near Bharatpur (208), echoed a little later by a humble village oilman: ‘Under your rule goat and tiger drink out of the same dish: under Congress that will not be so’ (209).

<sup>1</sup> *Young India*, 16 January 1930.

And in another chance encounter much farther south it was an ordinary workman who said : ' When you go, no one will care what will happen to us ' (281). In every province one caught the same refrain, summed up best perhaps in the words of a sagacious Sikh : ' You should keep a hand on our heads, as a father does with a child who cannot yet look after himself ' (98).

Some will think these remarks were made merely to please an Englishman. That was not my impression. The tendency was there, no doubt, and once at least exposed (240-1), but in a matter of this kind experience is not a bad guide, and though it is not easy, it is not impossible, even for an Englishman, to distinguish between what is meant and what is not. The desire for freedom was unmistakable, and logically that meant we should go. But the peasant is practical rather than logical, and the more thoughtful of them, while saying they wanted freedom, would add they wanted us to stay and help them, but ' as brothers and equals '. Even in so advanced a tract as the Lyallpur colony a general comment on our going was, '*Afsos ! Bara afsos !*—Alas ! Alas, alas !' (79). As to the many who had an unthinking desire for freedom, when it comes, said a Sikh, they will ' get amazed ' (197).

This was said in January. On January 24, the League in the Punjab, in desperation at still being out of office though much the largest party in the Assembly, started civil disobedience. On February 20 came Mr Attlee's historic announcement that power throughout India would be transferred ' to responsible hands ' not later than June 1948. But with dangerous vagueness he did not state whose those hands would be ; nor in expressing his anxiety to hand over responsibility to Governments ' capable of maintaining peace ' did he make capacity to do so a condition of the transfer. The promise was in fact unconditional. In the Punjab, where to partition or not to partition was the burning question, the immediate result was the collapse of the synthetic Government headed by Nawab Sir Khizar Hayat Tiwana, who resigned feeling that he could no longer hold the ring with his few Muslim supporters and the uncertain backing of Hindu and Sikh. The League tried

to form a Government in its place, but failed. The fear, however, that they might succeed and establish Muslim rule in a province where 44 per cent of the inhabitants were non-Muslim, where moreover the Sikhs had once ruled, led to disturbances in the larger towns. The north caught fire from Rawalpindi and before order could be restored, about 3,000<sup>1</sup> Hindus and Sikhs, mostly shopkeepers, were butchered. The attack fell with special fury upon the Sikh. The Muslim still remembered what he had suffered a hundred years before under Sikh rule.

When I passed through Lahore in December, the atmosphere was strained; but when I returned there in April after the disturbances, it was tense. The two parties—Hindu and Sikh on one side, Muslim on the other—were so equally matched that each feared to attack the other. But the balance, which before Mr Attlee’s statement was an advantage, was afterwards a disadvantage. With the naming of a date for our withdrawal, the struggle for power was a case of now or never, and since, in the prevailing state of feeling, partition could take no form acceptable to both Muslim and Sikh and both professed themselves ready to die rather than accept the unacceptable, it might well end, so high authority said, in each side massacring the other. A Sikh friend of long experience had no doubts on the subject. The withdrawal of the British, he said, would mean ‘collapse, carnage and chaos’.

Early in June 1947, despite, or because of, the writing on the wall, now in letters of blood, it was announced that we would hand over the whole of India by August 15. A few days later Pundit Nehru was telling India that ‘the most urgent task at present is to arrest the swift drift towards anarchy and chaos’.<sup>2</sup> In most of India, notably in Bengal, where Mr Gandhi made his powerful influence felt, it was arrested, but not in the Punjab. When August 15 came, this famous province—‘*terra antiqua potens armis atque ubere glebae*’—was ripped in two like a piece of old cloth and handed over in a day to anarchy, savagery and ruin. No one knows how many hundred thousand were

<sup>1</sup> The figure was given me by a high Punjab authority.

<sup>2</sup> As reported in *The Times* of 16 June 1947.

massacred. What is known is that 10 millions,<sup>1</sup> mostly helpless peasants, for whom we had a special responsibility born of our 98 years' rule, were uprooted from home and field and driven by sheer fear of death to seek safety across a line they had neither drawn nor desired, but which meant the shattering of their lives—a calamity even greater than when Tamurlane swept across the Punjab, marking his path with pyramids of skulls.

'If you wanted partition,' said a refugee peasant woman to Pundit Nehru, 'why did you not first make arrangements?'<sup>2</sup> Arrangements were made, but not what the occasion demanded. Nor was that possible with only six or seven weeks left after the preliminary formalities had been completed.<sup>3</sup> A Boundary Commission was set up; shadow Governments were formed to take over the administration in East and West Punjab; the dividing up of civil and military personnel between India and Pakistan was begun, and five Brigades were concentrated along the new boundary. But the Brigades were seriously under strength; the dividing up of civil and military created a sharp communal cleavage in both army and civil; and the members of the shadow Governments, with little or no experience of administration, had to take over as the storm was breaking and, in the case of the East Punjab, were without even a capital. As to the Boundary Commission, the leaders of all three communities had agreed to accept its decision and the principles on which decision was to be based, but these were so ambiguously expressed that it was possible for the Hindu and Sikh leaders to see one meaning in them, and for the Muslim leaders to see another.<sup>4</sup> The ambiguity became only too apparent when the Indian members of the Commission found it impossible to agree on the meaning of a vital phrase in the terms of reference and felt obliged to leave the award to their English Chairman. This want of agreement infected the partition proceedings throughout

<sup>1</sup> Five millions from East to West Punjab, and about the same from West to East.

<sup>2</sup> *India News*, 3 September 1947.

<sup>3</sup> These were not completed until about July 1.

<sup>4</sup> The terms 'areas' and 'other factors' were used without any indication of their precise significance.

and added to the confusion produced by the breakneck speed at which everything had to be done.

That tragedy on a large scale *might* well follow Mr Attlee's announcement of February 20 and *must* follow the announcement of June 3 was clear to anyone who saw the Punjab in the winter 1946-7 and who knew the violent volcanic character of the Sikh. Belonging to a comparatively small community, the Sikhs in the Punjab could never have been expected to accept a line which left nearly 40 per cent of them on the wrong side of it—that, too, at a time when they were thirsting to be avenged on the Muslims for their doings in March. It was a Sikh leader who said to me in April that, though they would not fight as long as we were there, they would certainly do so after we were gone if left under the domination of the Muslims. And it was a distinguished member of the League who said to me in December—‘if the English are unable to get the two parties to agree and the situation becomes impossible, they should have the guts to stay’. For long I had thought this neither necessary nor advisable where, as in most of India, stable Governments were functioning. But the Punjab was different, and what happened there should surely have been avoided at any cost compatible with our promises. There was one way of doing this—to stay there (and also, if necessary, in the Frontier Province and Sind) until real agreement was reached between Hindu, Muslim and Sikh and effective Governments were set up. In some good judgements this course, however difficult—and which course was not difficult?—would not have been impossible until the unconditional announcement of February 20 was made. And even then, with still sixteen months to run and with the smell of blood and hatred in the air, would it not have been wise to avoid the blinding breathless speed of a partition to be done in a few weeks? If my diary is any guide, delay would not have been unpopular with the peasantry, and no one could then have said, as was said by a Muslim peasant of the north, who was not even a refugee: ‘The English have flung away their Raj like a bundle of old straw, and we have been chopped in pieces like butcher’s meat.’”

\* Repeated to me by an Indian friend, to whom it was said.



## Chapter XII

### THE ADMINISTRATION

An important factor in the decision to leave India at the earliest possible date was the weakening of the administration. The administrative structure had been built up by a ruling class which, according to a distinguished historian, 'perhaps more nearly than any other' realized 'Plato's ideal of disinterested government'.<sup>1</sup> But it suffered from one fatal weakness: it was foreign. Its speech and ways were foreign; its standards were foreign; much of its education and law were foreign; its efficiency, its air of superiority, its very beneficence were foreign. Only its system of government, inherited from the Moghuls, and the bulk of its personnel were indigenous; but both were given a foreign twist, the system by the introduction of parliamentary government, itself incompatible with foreign rule; the personnel, by having to work under foreign masters. By the autumn of 1946 it was clear that, under the pressure of politics, propaganda and war, the structure, in spite of its noble proportions, was dangerously strained. The British Government itself seemed anxious to hasten its departure, and before we reached Jubbulpore it had fixed June 1948 as the latest date for its withdrawal.

Meanwhile provincial autonomy was in full swing throughout British India, with Ministers in power in every province. Attracted by the rising sun, people began to flock to their offices with grievance and request, by-passing the time-honoured approach to the District Officer, and many Ministers were too inexperienced to discourage the practice, though the more intelligent were beginning to realize its danger. In the Frontier Province a Deputy Commissioner complained that no one any longer came to see him, and in the United Provinces a Commissioner said that almost his only visitors were those who wanted a gun licence. British officers, many of them exhausted by the

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Fisher, *A History of Europe*, 1023.

strain of the war, began to lose zest and heart and to pine for the day of release, and Indian officers were almost obliged to trim their sails to the prevailing party wind. Perhaps those most affected were the rank and file who had the day-to-day task of carrying out the innumerable orders of Government. One after another remarked on the decline in their authority during the last ten or fifteen years, some said by eight annas in the rupee, none by less than four annas. This, however, was not an unmixed evil. To a large extent it followed from the greater independence of the people. Some, it was said in the Punjab, now have the courage to protest against the misuse of authority, and as a canal official remarked—‘people know their business, we cannot now keep them in the dark’.

More serious was the loss of personal touch between ruler and ruled. Many good men were drawn by the war and its problems from the District to the secretariat, and it became increasingly difficult for those who remained in the District to cope with all the inquiries, reports and new duties demanded of them. Village touring, so necessary in dealing with an illiterate people, suffered and, with the rise in prices, became almost prohibitively expensive, nor did the neglect of the roads make things any easier. ‘No one asks about our lot’ said a peasant who was living on starvation rations in the Central Provinces (265). ‘Officials come and go, but stomachs are empty’ exclaimed another in the Punjab (50). Again and again we were waylaid there by groups of peasants in manifest distress and with little chance, it seemed, of gaining the ear of authority. Not so had it been when officials perforce rode their daily marches and pitched their tents in the remotest villages. Change came with the advent of motor and lorry and was accelerated by the political developments which followed the first war. Till then the administration had been a monarchy tempered by bureaucracy—the monarchy of the district officer by the bureaucracy of the secretariat. But as departments multiplied and secretariats grew, it gradually turned into a bureaucracy tempered, ever less and less, by monarchy. Throughout the tour one had the feeling of an administration in only the loosest touch with the people and

served by officials, many of whom, but not all, paid far more attention to the demands of Government than to the needs of the people.

For this the Governments of the past were mainly responsible. Conscious of their foreign character and strongly imbued with the *laissez faire* doctrines of the 19th century, remembering, too, how Queen Victoria had disclaimed 'alike the right and the desire to impose Our convictions on any of Our subjects', they had consistently followed a policy of light taxation and non-interference with the ways of the people and had resolutely opposed the application of compulsion to the village. The aim was to give the peasant the kind of Government he trusted and respected—strong, just and accessible—rather than the kind he needed to face the modern world. So light was taxation that when the first war came, the total net revenue of the central and provincial Governments was no more than 87 crores, and even as late as the '30s it was only 174 crores (£130 millions), for a population, in British India, of nearly 300 millions. Unable to satisfy the needs of both town and country, Government's bias was towards the town, and with the establishment in 1920 of semi-autonomous Provincial Governments responsible for health, education and land, the peasant was almost forgotten at New Delhi. Owing to the narrow basis of taxation and to what Keynes called Gladstonian finance,<sup>1</sup> the new Governments were without the means, and sometimes without the will, to help him on the necessary scale. To this the Punjab was a partial exception owing to its greater wealth, the fruit of a superb irrigation system, and the peasant benefited accordingly, though not to the extent that his more ardent friends desired.<sup>2</sup>

Most marked was the contrast when we entered the United Provinces, and it continued all the way to Jubbulpore. Rarely in this area did we find a village with any but the most meagre modern facilities. In one of about

<sup>1</sup> To the writer in 1934.

<sup>2</sup> The *per capita* taxation in the Punjab in 1944-5 was nearly 70 per cent higher than in either the United or the Central Provinces (see Finance Minister, Bombay's budget speech of 24 February 1947).

2,000 inhabitants four miles from Agra, there was no dispensary for man or beast, no panchayat, no post office, not even a recognized school; its only amenity was a Co-operative society (214). In another village in the same district there was no dispensary within twelve miles; at a large village at the foot of the Vindhyas there was none within eighteen miles, and at another across the border in the Central Provinces the nearest medical dispensary was twenty-five miles away. Seldom did we come across the work of the Agricultural Department—one of the rare examples was not a happy one (279); few villages had either a panchayat or a Co-operative society, and hardly any a girls' school. I can naturally speak only for the villages we visited, but at least they were mostly chosen at random. Moreover, since we had to keep in daily touch with our truck, we were rarely very far from a high road. What we found, therefore, was probably above rather than below the average.

The most serious lack was the village school. There were far too few for boys, and for girls they hardly existed. The truth is, the ordinary peasant still wishes to keep his children at home: the boys, because he needs their help with the cattle,<sup>1</sup> the girls, because he still mistrusts education for women. Many even doubt its advantage for boys whose lot it must be to till the soil. In some areas compulsion has been tried, but owing to these feelings, with little success; nor has there been much willingness on the part of authority to enforce it. And so in India today four out of five are still illiterate, and the fifth is often literate only in name. No democracy of modern type can be built on such foundations, yet the danger of attempting this was appreciated by few.<sup>2</sup>

With illiteracy so general it was not surprising that at our village meetings we seldom found more than one or two persons—it might be a headman, a soldier, or that rarity, an educated peasant—who could mention any official above the head of the District; and even the one

<sup>1</sup> The headmaster at Bansi said that whereas 90 boys came to school, 500 stayed at home to help their parents.

<sup>2</sup> The 'liquidation of illiteracy' is now a main aim of India's provincial Governments; the U.P. Government, for example, plans to do this in ten years and to open 20,000 basic schools for the purpose.

or two had only the sketchiest acquaintance with their names. 'We are illiterate and know nothing,' said a Muslim headman in the north (38). Viceroy and Minister were rarely mentioned, and the only names at all familiar were those of Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah.

The peasant is not the man to speak with much warmth of anyone he doesn't know. Yet it was curious how little enthusiasm Mahatma Gandhi's great name evoked. Enthusiasm was not to be expected from Muslims, though one admitted he had woken up Hindustan; but it was surprising to hear a Hindu Rajput in his own province say he did not know whether he was good or bad, though he supposed he must be a big man because he was called Mahatma. In the Punjab he was accused, not by a Muslim but by a Sikh, of being on the side of the money-lending bania, from whom 'there is great harm to us peasant proprietors' (121). As to Nehru, the most explicit remark made about him, apart from a reference to his stormy visit to the Frontier, was—'he is sometimes in Delhi, sometimes in Calcutta, sometimes in Bombay' (212).

This ignorance of the outside world had one inevitable consequence: it put the peasant at the mercy of those who led him. *Bhedchal*—follow like sheep—had always been his way, and as long as the administrator was the shepherd, he was encouraged to live at peace with his neighbours, but with the rise of politician and propagandist, a very different type of shepherd appeared. 'Whatever the League does is right' was said in the Punjab (36), and even in Lahore, when in April I asked a prominent Leaguer what the League's policy would be now, the answer was—'we shall do what we are told'. It was much the same with the supporters of Congress. Only the Sikhs showed some independence of mind, criticizing all their leaders alike.

This unquestioning submission to leadership is partly the result of Indian tradition, which 'requires . . . the subjection of the pupil's will and reason to the direction of the master';<sup>1</sup> but it is not a good seed-bed for democracy, especially when it goes hand in hand with illiteracy. At present, millions of illiterates vote on questions they cannot

<sup>1</sup> Guy Wint, *India and Democracy*, p. 105.

understand and often for people they know nothing about. Hopes are roused which cannot be fulfilled, the demagogue thrives, and the rich man has a strong pull over one who is relatively poor. In the last two elections in the Punjab large sums were spent in canvassing and in bringing electors to the poll, averaging in 1946 as much as twenty to thirty thousand rupees (£1,500-£2,250) a candidate, and costing some well over a lakh (£7,500). In one case where a leader was concerned, the effort to unhorse him was so determined that five lakhs, it was said, was spent on one side and four on the other, and the price of a vote was pushed up to Rs. 400. Would not a system of indirect election be more appropriate as long as the present lack of education prevails ? The suggestion was made to Lord Lothian in 1932 when Chairman of the Franchise Committee, but his Committee condemned it as 'quite impracticable'. Yet on this tour we met two good judges who were in favour of it. One was the Sardar of Kot, who knows and understands the village better than most ; the other, the then Prime Minister of Patiala, who was proposing to include it in the constitution he was drawing up for the State.

Lord Bryce, who gave some thought to the relation of democracy to the peasant, considered it important that the peasant should be in a position to vote for someone he knew personally. This is impossible in a large area, but, as he rightly observed, in a small one 'men can know one another, learn to trust one another, reach a sound judgement on the affairs that directly concern them, fix responsibility and enforce it'.<sup>1</sup> In every rural constituency, therefore, I would have an electoral college consisting of the representatives of every village or village quarter elected, in the interests of continuity and harmony, for five, or even ten years ; and to eliminate the carpet-bagger, I would allow no non-resident to stand for election. Under this system, rural interests would tend to be represented in the Assembly by men well known in their constituencies and thoroughly familiar with local problems ; agitator and demagogue would be at a discount, and a long purse less potent.

Some may urge that faction will make the scheme

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Democracies*, 1921 (reprinted 1929), II, 554-5.

impracticable, and this was one reason why the Franchise Committee condemned it. Faction is doubtless a danger, but it is in the larger villages that it is most active, and if a representative were allowed for every four or five hundred inhabitants (or fraction thereof), it should generally be possible to adjust rival claims. Where faction made the scheme difficult to work, I would disfranchise the village until quarrels were made up. To safeguard the village servant and artisan, whose interests are commonly forgotten, though in the Punjab they often number 30 to 40 per cent of the village community,<sup>1</sup> it might be provided that, wherever more than one representative had to be elected, one of them should be a village servant. Finally, I would allow every man and woman over 25 a vote, and I doubt whether there is any other practicable way of giving adult suffrage to India's great shoal of illiterate humanity.<sup>2</sup>

If, as I believe, some scheme of indirect election is important to the establishment of democracy in the village (as it is at present), not less important to its healthy development is the creation of a network of efficient village panchayats. Few will dispute Sidney Webb's dictum that any system of government in India 'however mechanically perfect, will fail to take root in the midst of the mass of the people, unless it is in some way grafted on the spontaneous grouping of the people themselves'.<sup>3</sup> This would not have been difficult had the indigenous village panchayat survived. But few are left, and since what has lapsed cannot be revived, a fresh start has to be made. This has been done in a number of provinces, notably in the Punjab, and in Hoshiarpur they were well spoken of, but the general verdict, with which Mahatma Gandhi agreed,<sup>4</sup> was unfavourable. Some thought it a mistake to give them judicial as well as municipal powers, as it allows them to sit in judgement on their own orders and tends to put too much power

<sup>1</sup> According to my inquiries made before the last war; see also the Village Surveys done by the Punjab Board of Economic Enquiry. In the Central Provinces the percentage would seem to be over 40 (*C.P. Prov. Banking Enquiry Rpt.*, 1930, p. 41).

<sup>2</sup> The substance of the above is taken from two addresses, one to the East India Association on 16 December 1941, the other to the Royal Society of Arts (India Section) on 2 April 1943.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Matthai, *Village Government in British India*, 1915, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> p. 296.

into undisciplined hands. Others complained that the struggle for power led to faction. On the Ministerial side there was the temptation to appoint Supervisors on personal or party grounds. There were other weaknesses, but they are an argument, not for giving up the attempt to re-establish the panchayat—it is too seriously needed for that—but for fresh experiments, until the appropriate form for each part of India is discovered.

In the Punjab the Sardar of Kot is experimenting with a single panchayat for the thirty-five villages on his estate, and it is significant that the improvements the panchayat put first were fencing the cemeteries; giving each village two ponds for washing—one for humans, the other for cattle; sinking drinking wells, and improving the cart tracks linking one village with another. The choice was significant because it was the choice of the people themselves, and not of a peripatetic official, whose ideas, with his eye on those above him, might well have been different. As in fact was shown when it came to choosing the site of a Co-operative dispensary in the neighbourhood: the members of the society wanted it in one place, the local medical authorities in another—where they could easily inspect it!

Over a hundred years ago Sir Charles Metcalfe wrote: 'the union of their village communities has contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India through all changes', and he added that it was 'in a high degree conducive to their happiness'.<sup>1</sup> A network of strong healthy village communities based on the panchayat is more than ever needed today, for the panchayat (or a good Co-operative society) is the uneducated peasant's only way of making known his wishes effectively—and his wants vary from tract to tract—and also his best safeguard against being exploited or ignored. It is therefore of good augury that the United Provinces, Bombay and Bihar are all planning to extend panchayats throughout their territories;<sup>2</sup> but great, almost loving care will be needed to secure more crop than weeds.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Maud Diver in *Honoria Lawrence*, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> In the U.P. every village is to have a panchayat, and in Bombay every village, or group of villages, with a population of over a thousand.



A long-felt difficulty in improving village conditions is the poor quality of much of the personnel employed for the purpose. Too many of those we met—there were fine examples to the contrary—had little real feeling for the peasant or interest in doing more for him than an all too flexible sense of duty obliged. Considering their scanty pay they could hardly be blamed. Nor, in fact, does the peasant expect anything different. The four tests he applies in the Punjab before approving an official are—Is he immoral? Does he drink? Is he bigoted? And, most searching of all, is he corrupt? There, indeed, there was change for the worse: always endemic, corruption had flared up with a virulence which threatened to poison most of the rural activities of Government. ‘So rapidly have things gone downhill,’ said one official, ‘that God alone can save us’ (198). The *descensus Averni* began in the war. For then prices soared, demand outran supply, and officials multiplied, mostly on a temporary basis, which is no sure basis for honest dealing. ‘It is only the character roll which keeps us honest’ said a Tehsildar, and to the temporary employee the character roll is of small importance. The example on p. 89 shows what large sums could be made in only a year or two by even the humblest clerk. The high prices brought the peasant comparative wealth and one official said, he can now offer any bribe, and whereas it was once the petty official who corrupted him, it is now the other way round. For one department, the Department of Civil Supplies, we did not hear a good word from one end of our route to the other. ‘They all loot, and they loot both rich and poor’ was a typical comment (195), and in the Punjab some said they had even outdone the police. The police, indeed, were credited with some improvement—a tiny spot of light in a dark world. ‘There can be no freedom as long as there is bribery’ said someone in the United Provinces. This may be a little pessimistic, but what can more safely be asserted is that, if the disease is not arrested—and it infects both high and low—the vast plans for helping the peasant to a higher standard of living will be still-born.

But is there a country where the war has not led to an increase of corruption? In India it could hardly have

been otherwise. Though prices were three hundred per cent up, the 'dearness of living allowance' for all but the humbler officials was less than fifty per cent. In a village near Jhansi I found a master teaching thirty boys on a salary of Rs. 20 a month (£18 a year), and another in the Central Provinces on Rs. 26, in both cases less than the cooly was earning. Another hard yet typical case was that of a Deputy Forest Ranger who had to support a family of ten (including his mother) on Rs. 68 a month (£61 a year). An epidemic of strikes—justified if ever strikes were—was at last compelling Governments to take notice, and last May it was proposed, very belatedly, to fix Rs. 55 a month (£50 a year) as the minimum for working families and Rs. 90 for middle-class families, with certain concessions in both cases. The increase was expected to cost the Central Government alone thirty crores (£22½ million) a year, and that no doubt explains why salaries had not been more substantially raised during the war. Yet would it not have been wiser to increase pay rather than officials?—for what country can thrive if its public servants are not paid a living wage?

Freedom was not the only note which echoed all along our route. There was another, more discordant, which augured badly for it—the black market, or 'the black' as it was everywhere called in the vernacular. It 'greedily ingorged' anything from twenty to fifty per cent of the cloth, sugar and wheat, at the expense of the poor man's rations, and disgorged them at prices never less than thirty per cent, and sometimes four to five hundred per cent above official rates. In the Jhansi District, where the wheat had been severely damaged by rust, it was being sold at Rs. 26 a maund, which was more than twice the official price (Rs. 12); and at Saugor, where the crop had almost been wiped out, the black market rate was Rs. 40. In normal times a deficit in one area would be quickly made good from the surplus in another, but with a general shortage and a transport system hamstrung by the war, this was impossible.

Wherever crops had failed, a large percentage of the villagers—seventy to eighty per cent in one area—were having to buy their grain, and since the daily allowance was much below their needs—in the Central Provinces, only

12 oz. of millet instead of the 2 lb. required by a peasant for health<sup>1</sup>—the black market was the only means of getting enough to eat. But woe to those who could not pay its rates! That so many were able to do so was due to the prosperity mentioned above. But there were signs that this was passing, and when it is past, the black market may turn from a safety-valve into a powder-magazine.

As it was, there was one 'universal hiss' at the whole system with its minions, parasites and leeches. 'Legalized robbery' one official called it (66), and on another occasion when freedom was mentioned and I said 'haven't you got it already?', someone exclaimed ironically: 'Perfect freedom—we have neither sugar nor cloth, and when we go for our rations, all we get is two kicks' (215). There were many who blamed the Congress Governments for the shortage—little does the peasant know of world conditions—and I had often to defend them, but what I could not defend was the way the shortage was being handled. Their excuse was that they had been in office less than a year, perhaps even that they were attempting the impossible.

The shortage of grain varied from tract to tract, but the shortage of cloth was with us everywhere. The allowance in the village was only about twelve yards a year for men, who required at least twenty for a single outfit, and no more for women, who required over forty. 'Barely enough to bind a wound' said one cynic, with less exaggeration than usual, seeing how many had to wait months for even part of their quota. Yet in the larger centres—Lahore, for example—there were shops where, it was said, almost anything could be bought at a price. In England any hardship due to the coupon system has been mitigated for most by the amount of clothing in wardrobe and drawer when the system started. The Indian peasant, with neither wardrobe nor drawer and generally with only two suits of clothing, had almost no reserve. The results in the less prosperous areas were often pitiful, touching self-respect to the quick. In one village, out of the twenty-six present at our meeting, eighteen said they had no shoes and all had had them before the war.

<sup>1</sup> *Saugor Gazetteer*, 1906, p. 83.

- Nothing showed more clearly the tendency to sacrifice the village to the town than the way sugar and cloth were distributed between them. No favourite wife could have been treated with more favour than the town. On the specious ground that homespun cloth was available in the village, specious because the supply of yarn was strictly limited, the townsman was allowed fifty to one hundred per cent more cloth than the villager. The difference with sugar was even greater. In the Punjab, the townsman got 20 to 24 oz. a month and the villager only 4 to 6 oz., and in the United and Central Provinces it was much the same. The peasant prefers gur, said the headquarter pundits, and where sugar-cane was freely grown, the argument was valid. But where, as in most of the country we went through, there was little or no cane, gur had to be imported at a cost of Rs. 20 or more a maund, rising near Jubbulpore to Rs. 40, and before the war it cost only three or four rupees.

Another town-inspired argument was that the townsman with his higher standard of living needed more sugar and cloth. True enough, if the test is demand, but the principle opens the door wide to every kind of partiality. The only way to avoid this, or at least to keep a hand on the door, is to follow the more democratic principle of equality. So little was this done in the case of sugar that the monthly allowance in the town varied with income—in the Nagpur District, for example, from one to twenty pounds, while the villager in the tehsil I visited got less than  $1\frac{1}{4}$  oz., though very little cane was grown there.<sup>1</sup>

Equally undemocratic was the method of distribution. In the Jhansi District it had been entrusted to unofficial committees chosen under the auspices of the Congress party. The result at Gona was a committee of twenty-three with eleven members representing about 1,000 Brahmins and shopkeepers and only twelve the 60,000 cultivators concerned. At Bansi in the same District the forty local shopkeepers had seventeen representatives and the 50,000 villagers of the neighbourhood only four. At Talagang in

<sup>1</sup> The village allotment was 40 lb. per 100 houses (information received from the local Supply Officer).

the Punjab the set-up was even more lopsided. The whole tehsil was at the mercy of a syndicate of fourteen, all traders, and only one of them a Muslim though the tract was predominantly Muslim. The village servant fared worst of all, rarely getting on to any committee. Yet, with little or no land of his own, he is the first to feel any shortage of grain.

Full use had of course to be made of the trader and his expert knowledge, but was it necessary to give him a virtual monopoly? More use could surely have been made of the Co-operative society, especially in the Punjab where they numbered nearly 30,000. For long, too, the returned soldier was virtually ignored. New Delhi's tender attitude towards merchant and shopkeeper made it difficult even for the Unionist Government in the Punjab to help him, much as it wished to do so.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, we came across men, even striplings, who had been given the coveted permit to trade in return for some service to Congress. As a prominent Hindu lawyer in a U.P. District put it—he had actually voted for Congress—‘however big a rogue a man is, six months in jail washes away all crimes’. He added that only ten per cent of the Congress workers in his District had any genuine public spirit. My own impression was not very different; nor was Mr Patel's, judging by a speech he made at Ahmedabad in April. He complained, to quote a newspaper report,<sup>2</sup> that ‘falsehood, selfishness and profiteering were rampant’, that ‘hoarders had no desire to share their hoarding with the hungry and the naked’, that ‘the hunger for power had seized everybody’, that ‘the Congress Governments were not able to feed and clothe the people’, and, echoing the lawyer, that the jobs in hand ‘could not be done by those whose only qualification was going to jail for winning the freedom of the country’.

Unjust, incompetent and corrupt, the control system cried out to be mended or ended. ‘It weighs us down with a stone’ (184) is typical of what was said in the Punjab, and a N.C.O., who had been a German prisoner of war,

<sup>1</sup> Eventually they took the matter into their own hands, and when we passed through Talagang about a quarter of the licensed distributors were ex-soldiers. The remaining 75 per cent were non-Muslims.

<sup>2</sup> *The Hindustan Times*, 4 April 1947.

when asked what the countryside needed most, replied—a proper ration system as in Germany and France. But conditions in India and the vastness of the problem—400 millions to clothe and feed—made this impossible. Even in so important a town as Calcutta there were ‘not less than a million bogus ration cards’.<sup>1</sup> Dishonesty on this scale is difficult to mend and now, in the new Dominion of India, it is proposed to withdraw rationing from all rural areas.<sup>2</sup>

Over two thousand years ago Socrates suggested that anyone charged with the distribution of food should have ‘no advantage in spending and consuming it . . . if he is to avoid retribution’.<sup>3</sup> Had the Hindu and Sikh trader of the northern Punjab followed this principle, they might not have fared so cruelly in the communal outbreak last March, for, as Bacon said, ‘the rebellions of the belly are the worst’, a saying pregnant with warning for a country so short of food and so disturbed as India is today.

### INDIAN STATES

All I have said so far relates to British India (old style), but nearly one quarter of India’s population lives outside it in semi-independent States. Wishing to see whether they fared better or worse than their fellows, I chose a route which would take us through six States. Too few for any positive judgement, they yet represented a wide variety of condition and ruler. The rulers included two Sikhs, two Jats, one Mahratta and one Bundela Rajput, but no Muslim. One State, Gwalior, was as large as Eire and amongst the most important in India; another was the premier Sikh State, and even the smallest (Datia) had a population of nearly 200,000. None of them, therefore, was without some significance.

Indian States enjoyed one great advantage over British India: being indigenous, their Governments were rooted

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *The Statesman in India News* for the week ending 3 July 1947.

<sup>2</sup> In December 1947, in deference to Mahatma Gandhi, India (new style) adopted a policy of decontrol. In September 1948 it decided gradually to reimpose control.

<sup>3</sup> *Gorgias*, p. 490. Trn. W. R. M. Lamb.

in the habits of the people and, where ruler and ruled shared the same faith, in their affections as well. In the village, too, their very demerits, unless abnormally developed, were accepted as part of the natural order of things. They had another advantage, unless the ruler was bad—continuity, a point which has a special attraction for people who attach themselves more readily to a person than an institution. In the provinces, Collector and Commissioner would be changed every two or three years, sometimes every two or three months, but Maharaja and Nawab were there for a lifetime and their families for generations.

As to the States we rode through, after only seventeen days in their territories I hesitate to generalize, but one feature was clear: modern facilities were even less conspicuous than in the surrounding British Districts. That was perhaps inevitable in the smaller States, for, as a Bharatpur peasant who had seen the Punjab remarked, how can a small State do what a large province does? Even in Patiala, with its population of two millions, the contrast was marked. Schools, hospitals, dispensaries were fewer, Co-operative societies hardly existed, cattle-breeding was little encouraged, and, in spite of the example of the Punjab, no attempt had been made to consolidate holdings. In most States—and I have seen others as well—modern facilities tend to be concentrated at the capital, or in the larger towns, to the almost entire neglect of the village. Not that the village feels neglected, for the unsophisticated do not miss what they have never had. And it is at least spared the harassment of constant visits from departmental officials—so many where Progress rules that one cynic who knew the village well remarked: ‘The day will come when the peasant will turn his back upon them all’.

When one inquires into the details of the administration, the impression varies from State to State. ‘Honey-combed with intrigue and nothing done without persistent pressure’ was said of one. Of another, that there was less corruption but more delay than in the adjoining British District. Of a third, where men from the Punjab were buying land, it was loudly stated (and doubtless overstated) that where a constable in the Punjab took Rs. 15, in the

State he took Rs. 500. In yet a fourth the police were described as less oppressive. There were similar variations in British Districts, but the more personal rule of the States swings the pendulum more violently from one extreme to the other. In no province did I get such a string of complaints as met me on crossing into Bharatpur. On the other hand, communalism and its propaganda had not yet poisoned the village, though it was beginning to inject its venom into capital and town. One subject of complaint was common to both province and State—the ration system. But it was in a State that we met the first peasant who had no complaint to make about either sugar or cloth.

One positive impression must be noted, as I felt it in all six States. I was back in the submissive atmosphere of forty years ago when all bowed low in the presence of authority and few dared to challenge its behests. Despotism still prevailed and there was little sign of the outspokenness so happily characteristic of what we found in the Punjab. The one example of it in the presence of authority came significantly from a Punjabi who had migrated to Central India.

But the question I put to myself most often as I observed those around me was, are they happier or less happy than their fellows in British India? My impression, and it was nothing more, was that they were at least as contented, and possibly a little more so. If this is true, it is perhaps due primarily to a simplicity of life which Mahatma Gandhi regarded as the village's greatest need. It has often struck me in listening to the prosperous canal colonist in the Punjab that, with the peasant who has enough to eat and to wear, contentment is almost in inverse ratio to material progress. If that is so, it is a reminder that material progress and welfare are not synonymous, and that in the Indian village the former will not lead to the latter unless balanced by spiritual progress. But that can hardly be expected until the present very low standard of teacher, mullah and priest is raised.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 296; also the following: 'Not only in villages but even in cities the imparting of religious education is entrusted to teachers who though literate are not educated. To them religion means nothing but bigotry'—Maulana Azad, Minister of Education, to the Central Advisory Board of Education, at New Delhi, 13 January 1948.



On one point I can write with more confidence. In final analysis the quality of Indian State rule depends upon the ruler, whether he is the head of the State or a Minister who rules on his behalf. Where, as in Dholpur, the head of the State sets himself to follow the best Hindu traditions of kingship, or where the reins are committed to a Minister who is honest, diligent and wise, there can be little doubt that then the peasant has a Government which suits him. But how to secure a succession of good rulers and ministers ? Ay, there's the rub. The history of Indian States affords but too many examples of the truth of Lord Acton's dictum — 'power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'.<sup>1</sup> Absolute power should clearly go, and indeed in the States is going ; but it should not pass the wit of man to devise some system in its place which will combine personal rule with personal freedom, monarchy with democracy. An attempt to establish pure democracy may well end in a return to absolutism, not to the absolutism of the past, which was restrained by tradition and custom, but to its modern counterpart, which acknowledges neither law nor limit.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Bishop Creighton.

## Chapter XIII

### CHANGE IN THE VILLAGE

#### I—CASTE AND RELIGION

There are six factors which make for change in the Indian village—education, a period of prosperity or adversity, the services supplied by Government, the army, the motor bus, and the neighbourhood of a large town. In the last decade or two, towns had grown, buses had multiplied, schools and Government services had increased, war had greatly enlarged the army, and a great rise in prices due to war had brought the peasant a sudden prosperity. Change, therefore, was everywhere at work.

At first sight, the psychological changes at least seemed mostly for the worse, and many good judges were hard put to it to name any for the better. Most thought litigation had increased ; all commented on the increase of corruption, and some, including Mahatma Gandhi, deplored the growth of the acquisitive spirit ; the spread of the communal virus was only too evident and hardly balanced by the blind desire for freedom ; and no one contradicted the greybeards who said that in their youth there was more feeling for religion and truth. Even when I suggested that there had been an increase of self-respect, the answer in one case was that it was only an increase of self-regard. Remembering the extreme submissiveness of the Punjab peasant to authority forty years ago—an attitude inspired more by fear than respect, and good for neither ruler nor ruled—I found it difficult to agree. Very different, outside the States, was the peasant's attitude now. The change, which was not confined to the Punjab,<sup>1</sup> was affecting all the traditional forms of authority—its effect on the authority of Government has already been noted—and it was tending to narrow the gulf, often very wide, between those above and those

<sup>1</sup> An Executive Engineer, who had recently returned to the Meerut District after twelve years, commented on the change there and said that now any attempt to take advantage of the peasant would be followed by complaint.

below. The gulf was at its widest in the village, and there, too, the harrowing process was at work. To understand this, the social structure of the village community must be briefly described.

In the Indian village status or degree plays the same part as it did in England when Shakespeare wrote :

How could communities . . .  
But by degree, stand in authentic place ?  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And, hark, what discord follows !

Every village has its unwritten warrant of precedence, even those belonging to the democratic Sikh. Take, for example, a large Sikh village in the central Punjab. According to one who lives there, first and foremost comes the oldest land-owner, with the village headman just below, and below him the headman's son, not so much on account of his birth as because he is educated and 'can sit on committees'. The village officials and the headmaster of the neighbouring High School rank next, followed by the land-owners who can live on their rents or other resources. Linked with them, but another step below, are shopkeeper and peasant proprietor, and yet another step down, the tenant. Shopkeeper and land-owner may sit on the same bedstead, with due regard to its head or foot, but not landlord and tenant. For the tenant the more appropriate place is the durrie.

These are the freemen of the village. Below them come the village servants, and these, too, have their grades. First in respect come 'the God-fearing', whatever their calling, and after them the barber, who as 'marriage broker, surgeon, chiropodist and quack' is dubbed Raja. In less prosaic days the minstrel, surnamed Mirzada or Son of a Lord, was of equal rank ; but now blacksmith and carpenter come before him, and he sits with waterman, washerman and oilman. Finally, at the base of the pyramid and till recently almost crushed by its weight, yet upholding its structure, come tanner and sweeper, both untouchable ; the tanner, because he skins the dead cattle ; the sweeper, because he removes the village refuse and also, it may be,

<sup>1</sup> Risley, *The People of India*, p. 129.

its night-soil. These two form the great bulk of India's 50 million untouchables.

How the untouchable was faring, was one of the points on which I was most eager for information. It was eighteen years since my first inquiries. Since then Mahatma Gandhi's teaching and example had focused public attention on the way they were treated, and great efforts had been made by their leaders, headed by Dr Ambedkar, to improve their position, with striking result. Although the change varied greatly in degree with a village's distance from high road or town, there were not many we visited where some improvement could not be discerned, and in the most advanced scarcely a vestige of the old disabilities remained.

Touch, water and temple are the three crucial barriers, and the first to give way is touch. 'We saw you shaking hands with them,' said a zaildar in the Punjab; 'we did the same, and now in my village one has become M.L.A.'<sup>1</sup> Few now wash when touched, but the older generation still give themselves and their clothes a sprinkling of water, and the younger, too, in the remoter villages. Only in the more advanced villages is the untouchable allowed to sit on the same durrie as his neighbours.<sup>2</sup> This is understandable in a country where men commonly squat together knee to knee and are sensitive to differences of diet. The way to closer contact has been opened wherever the untouchable has given up eating carrion, and in one village that was how three tanners came to be sitting on the durrie in front of me with everyone else. Ten or fifteen years before that would not have been possible. In another village (near Roorkee) the tanner was allowed to sit on the durrie if cleanly dressed. Cleanliness is the essence of the matter, and that is why the sweeper fares less well, especially if he handles night-soil; and the tanner, too, if he continues to skin the dead cattle.<sup>3</sup> Both are necessary functions, and

<sup>1</sup> Member of the Legislative Assembly; see p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> When I rode through Karnal in 1928, the untouchable was allowed to sit in the same courtyard as his neighbours but only on the bare ground. Now he is even allowed on the durrie (not on the bedstead), and peasants who have come under the influence of the Arya Samaj will even take water from him.

<sup>3</sup> The tanner is very often an agricultural labourer and as such hardly to be distinguished in function, from the peasant.

at one meeting someone who thought change was going too far exclaimed, ' Who now will skin our dead animals ? ', which provoked the sensible reply that there would be no objection if afterwards hands were washed. This was in Gwalior State, where an enlightened policy had ordered temples to be thrown open to all regardless of caste. But a new discrimination was slipping in with the distribution of sugar : the untouchable's extra quota for a wedding was smaller than the peasant's.

In few villages is the untouchable free of the common well, unless it has been sunk by Government, in which case all may use it. And so splintering is the effect of caste on the Indian mind that the tanner will not share his well with the sweeper. The sweeper must either sink one of his own, which is very difficult for the very poor, or wait at the common well until some charitable neighbour appears and draws water for him.

The last stronghold of orthodoxy is the temple. In Gwalior, as I have noted, the right of entry has been conceded by State decree. Yet even here the subtle Hindu mind erects a final barrier. The tanner may enter the temple, but not, in one case at least, the innermost shrine, where others go to garland their god.<sup>1</sup> Minute, too, are the refinements of social practice. In a village in the Central Provinces the Brahmin landlord, who was most progressive where his land was concerned, allowed neither tanner nor sweeper on to his verandah, but whereas the tanner might come up the verandah steps, the sweeper might not set foot on even the lowest step.

In one respect no change was visible. Tanner and sweeper still live on the outermost fringe of the village, often on opposite sides, and in both cases with so little room for house and courtyard and in such numbers that one wondered how they lived at all. Yet the tanner's quarter was often spotless.

The Hindu villager's almost crazy fear of pollution at the hands of the untouchable is matched by an almost superstitious reverence for the Brahmin. But, as the

<sup>1</sup> By a Bill passed on 11 September 1947, Bombay has thrown open all temples to untouchables.

untouchable becomes more human, so does the Brahmin become less divine. Though many still touch his feet, massage his legs and give him first call on their meagre supply of milk, he is no longer treated as a demigod. His prestige and authority are on the decline; and though the change varies from village to village, in those we visited the decline was rarely put at less than four to eight annas in the rupee. One Brahmin declared that only one anna of the old respect was left, but he was a soldier and, like countless other Brahmins who have taken to plough, pen or sword, he performed no Brahminical duty. When that is so, the Brahmin becomes, to quote a Jat saying, 'a thing with a string round its neck',<sup>1</sup> and his only privilege will be, when sharing a bedstead with a neighbour, to sit at its head. If, on the other hand, he acts as Purohit or consultant for horoscope and auspicious occasions, he still comes first; and the Pujari or temple priest, though technically a village servant, sits with the land-owners.<sup>2</sup>

It is one of the happier aspects of not very happy times that the Brahmin is losing his halo and the untouchable his stigma. The same trend is at work in Muslim villages with the influence of the Pir, and broadly it may now be said that in any village penetrated by the new light both Brahmin and Pir, if they wish to be venerated, must be true to their religious obligations.<sup>3</sup>

In the Hindu village caste gives degree an added force. The narrowing of the gulf between Brahmin and untouchable suggests that the force is weakening and that caste is relaxing its age-long hold on Hindu society. One Indian writer of wide knowledge and experience thinks the contrary is the case, and he attributes this to the communal character of politics, to the political awakening of the untouchable with his demand for separate representation, and to 'the greatly increased consciousness of being Hindu amongst Hindus'.<sup>4</sup> But this is not the common view, and

<sup>1</sup> Risley, *op. cit.*, 126; the allusion is to the sacred thread worn by the Brahmin.

<sup>2</sup> According to a Brahmin from the Karnal District, the change began about ten years ago; till then the Brahmins in his village came first whatever their occupation. Yet in another village the other side of the Jumna we found that the two Brahmin cultivators still came first and that people still touched their feet.

<sup>3</sup> For some account of the Pir see *Rusticus*, index.

<sup>4</sup> K. M. Panikkar, Convocation address to Andhra University.

most educated Hindus would, I think, say that the sanctions and restrictions of caste are much less rigidly applied than thirty or forty years ago.

The two tests are food and marriage. So much weaker now are the barriers due to food that amongst those who accept European ways of life inter-dining is universal irrespective of caste or creed, though, as the incidents related on pages 91 and 167 show, little difficulties remain where the difference is of both caste and creed. Even amongst the orthodox there is change, as I found when I dined with the ruler of a Mahratta State in 1933. I had dined with him first in 1907, and on both occasions the dinner was on Indian lines and the company included some Brahmins. But whereas in '07 the Brahmins were placed almost out of sight, in '33 there was little more than the length of a midday shadow between us. Marriage is a more serious affair, and till recently it presented an almost insuperable barrier to lovers divided by caste or creed, and only the most ardent ignored it. It is still not common between Brahmin and non-Brahmin, or between followers of different creeds, but amongst the intelligentsia there must be few now who cannot quote examples from their acquaintance.

In the village the food and marriage barriers are as strong as ever, and communalism has done nothing to weaken them. The Muslim still likes his meat slaughtered in one way, and the Sikh in another, and we heard of one village where the Muslims would not sell goat or hen to the Sikh, lest they should be slain heretically. During the war the army did much to promote inter-dining, and in one camp of 5,000 recruits with such success that the twenty different messes required at first were eventually reduced to nine.

The sanction behind caste is a religion so ancient and all-embracing that any social change is difficult without its assent. Its power and pervasiveness were a constant impression. There was the pilgrim peasant who had walked across India from shore to shore; the Mahant who retailed bogus spells with a doubtful conscience; the Baba who went from village to village in an odour of sanctity, with an elephant for whom alone the branches of the sacred

pipal tree might be cut ; the Maharaja who fed the denizens of the jungle where once he shot ; the heart-broken wife who threw herself on to her husband's pyre ; the wandering minstrels on their way to act a great religious epic to a village audience ; the five thousand gathered together at a famous shrine to hear holy writ and feast ; the many ascetics met on the road, young and old, lean and fat, and the innumerable images of Shiva, lingam and bull under roadside trees.

If there was change, it was not very perceptible. Attendance at gurdwara and temple was perhaps less frequent, and at the mosque a little less regular ; fewer make the longer pilgrimages, and the one astrologer we met said that only one anna in sixteen was left of his business. Yet even in so progressive a village as the one described on p. 164, all but ten to fifteen per cent have horoscopes cast. On the other hand, the village had built itself a school rather than a temple. And in another village a Brahmin, when asked which of the two was best, replied ' for these days the school ' (103). But such sensitiveness to the times was still rare. More typical was the village which had no school and was building a temple for seven or eight hundred rupees.

To the rationalist the atmosphere which surrounds the village temple is thick with superstition. Superstition no doubt there is, the product of credulity, magic and legend, but blind would be he who saw no more than that in the peasant's heart and mind. For there, mixed up it is true with gross and even savage instincts, as fine grain with dust and dirt, may be found the seed of real religion—a sense of the mystery of life, of the nearness of death, of the feebleness of man and of the power and strength of God—expressing itself in an equal acceptance of fortune good or bad, in an indifference to material things not positively needed, and in a feeling of obligation to neighbour, guest and kin, and even to the cattle in the byre.

To the Hindu the cow is an object of veneration, and even when she is old and dry, the Hindu peasant, and often the Sikh, will not sell her to the butcher or his agent, unless pressed hard by poverty or drought.<sup>1</sup> ' A mother sings to

<sup>1</sup> In the village near Agra (p. 214) old bullocks are sold but not cows.



her child that the cow is the mother of her babe, and if you hear that as a child,' said a Brahmin, 'it sinks in' (168). Hardly less strong is the peasant's feeling for the bullock which has served him well, and whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, many would endorse what a peasant said to me on a previous tour: 'When a bullock has worked ten years for me, am I to sell it because it can work no longer? I am not so entirely without pity as that.'

In the town one will be told that these feelings belong to the past, but the incident mentioned on p. 231 and my other inquiries suggest the contrary, though here, too, change may be discovered where, as in the tract to the north of Delhi,<sup>2</sup> education, need, or a new acquisitive spirit is at work.

With the Hindu the feeling for animal life extends far beyond bullock and cow, and with the Jain it embraces all creation. The strict Jain will not kill even an insect, however hostile or irritating to man, and, for fear of swallowing one, he will not eat after sunset. This is to carry to its logical extreme the Hindu doctrine of *ahimsa*, which forbids the taking of life. The peasant lives too near the jungle not to make some exceptions—in one village the three were snakes, mad dogs and poisonous lizards, but where the threat is to crops and not to life, he holds his hand, and India's inadequate food supply suffers accordingly, as we found near Saharanpur where there were monkeys on every tree. Widespread was the complaint of their depredations, and but for them the vegetables so greatly needed in a vegetarian country would be more freely grown. Only very occasionally does resentment rouse the peasant to action. And then, such is the respect for the followers of Hanuman, the monkey king, all that is done is to catch the marauders and pack them off in lorry or cart to some distant and, let us hope, uninhabited spot. How strong the feeling can be is shown by what followed the rape of the Brahmin's coat and watch described on p. 168. Great, therefore, was my surprise to find that in a village of Hindu Jats fifty or sixty of them had been shot. This was the most

<sup>1</sup> *Rusticus*, p. 373.

<sup>2</sup> One who knew the tract well said the change was a big one.

daring innovation we came across, and it would, I think, have had the approval of Mahatma Gandhi, who twenty years ago said it might be necessary to do this if the growing of fruit and vegetables required it.<sup>1</sup>

## II—FOOD, HOUSING AND CLOTHES

On the purely material side there were many changes for the better. The three hundred per cent rise in prices, which set in sharply in 1942, had put more cash into the peasant's pocket than had ever been there before, and he had wisely used it to pay his debts and redeem his land, and in the canal colonies of the Punjab, where almost every drop of water produced a rupee, to buy land in Bahawalpur, Bikaner or Sind. For the first time for at least two generations debt was no longer a millstone round the peasant's neck.<sup>2</sup>

With the demands of the money-lender greatly reduced and those of Government satisfied by the sale of far less produce, the peasant had much more left for himself and his family, and though most of those we met declared they ate no more than before, some, perhaps the more candid, admitted the contrary. The Punjabi with his three meals a day—the first one more a snack than a meal—had probably had enough to eat before. What he lacked was variety, and that is why he had long been urged to grow more fruit and vegetables and keep poultry, all three important to the small holder who desires a good standard of living. Twenty years ago, unless he belonged to one of the market gardener tribes, he thought it derogatory to grow vegetables, and if a Hindu he regarded the hen as unclean.<sup>3</sup> In the Punjab the first prejudice was definitely weakening and this, with the greater abundance of fruit, was giving the peasant a healthier diet. But only here and there was there a sign of a more tolerant Hindu attitude towards the hen. A religious taboo was involved, and though the price of eggs had risen from half an anna to 2 annas each, characteristically

<sup>1</sup> *Young India*, 4 October 1938. For the influence of Islam in the village see *Rusticus*.

<sup>2</sup> My inquiries suggest that in the Punjab from 75 to 90 per cent of the unsecured debt was cleared and from 66 to 75 per cent of the mortgage debt.

<sup>3</sup> cf. *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 179.

that counted for nothing—a good example of the influence, always strong in India, of religion on economics. To the south of the Punjab we found little sign of change in regard to either vegetables or poultry. In one village no vegetables were grown, though Jhansi's excellent market was only two miles away, and the suggestion that they should keep poultry was regarded as almost improper.

Two comparatively new habits were spreading fast—tea-drinking and the smoking of the leaf cigarette. Only a 'sour severity' could condemn the first. Yet in the village it adds a serious item to a not very elastic budget; the lowest estimate a head, with the accompanying sugar or gur, was two annas a day, and there is the cost of the tea-set as well. Before the first war only men of means were tea-drinkers, but with the return of the soldier after the war the habit stole into the village, and with the last war it spread throughout the recruiting areas of the north, and now amongst the Pathans the cup of tea plays the same hospitable part as the cup of coffee in Egypt and Arabia. Some thought it made men weak, even ill; others just the contrary, and one peasant said, 'I cannot walk until I have drunk it' (61).<sup>1</sup>

More questionable is the spread of the leaf cigarette. It is subverting the sociable hookah, and men who never smoked before have succumbed to its seduction, as some candidly admitted to the detriment of their health. In the Central Provinces it has given birth to a new domestic industry, which is so remunerative and so much lighter than work in the fields that in the tract we passed through agriculture was running short of labour. Where the hookah has not been supplanted, the cost was put, on a cautious estimate, at Rs. 2 a month or about half the cost of the tea habit.

With the shortage of cloth, clothes were probably at a lower ebb than for fifty years, except in the case of officers, landlords and the like, who could pay the black market's exorbitant prices. Where before the war two suits of

<sup>1</sup> In the Punjab the habit varies with the influence of the soldier. We were told, for example, that it was almost universal north of the Jhelum, and common in Hoshiarpur and in Patiala, but not in the Lyallpur colony or in Ambala.

clothes were the rule, many now had to manage with one. Shoes, too, were a difficulty, and in one village we found a number of men with no shoes at all. A case of 'I have no more shoes than feet; nay, sometimes more feet than shoes'. But that was one of the poorest villages we saw.

Houses showed little change, and owing to timber and bricks being in short supply, few new ones had been built. With the great growth of population this was a manifest danger to health and likely to make tuberculosis more than ever a menace to the village.

Here I feel I must enter a protest against the charge of squalor and slum frequently levelled at the Indian village, a charge far more applicable to town and townlet. In a country of 650,000 villages it would be strange if there were not many which were ill kept; but, if I may judge by what I have seen in different parts of India,<sup>1</sup> there are as many, perhaps even more, which have nothing very serious to be ashamed of. The photograph facing p. 211 will perhaps give some idea of the charm of many of those we saw in the Central Provinces, and I have seen equally charming ones in Eastern Bengal, while I doubt whether even a Dutch interior could exceed in shining cleanliness the Jangli dwellings of the Western Punjab.<sup>2</sup> We saw many different types of village on our ride, but few that roused any feeling of disgust, though many lacked this or that. More space was what many badly needed, for congestion makes cleanliness almost impossible. But much depended on the character of the people, and as there are all sorts and conditions of men—and also of women—so there were all sorts and conditions of houses, ranging from caverns of 'thick darkness' begrimed with smoke to houses whose clean and simple beauty made one gasp with astonishment. I went into many and met hundreds of villagers at close quarters, yet never once did I bring away with me any of those sly secretive infiltrators who murder sleep. For this perhaps I had the sun, India's incomparable disinfector, to thank, for when we crossed the Jumna we found most of

<sup>1</sup> My work took me round India in 1934-5 and 1945-6.

<sup>2</sup> cf. *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 229.

the houses in a state of confusion and far from clean, redeemed, however, by a beauty of doorway, colonnade and arch.

### III—ARMY AND SCHOOL

The changes in the standard of living were most evident in the Punjab. There were three reasons for this. The first was the higher level of prosperity, shown on the road by the flow of buses and bicycles and by the sight of occasional horsemen; in the villages, by the number of solid brick houses; inside the houses, by the variety of possessions; and in the people themselves, by the superior quality of their food and clothes. Secondly, as already noted (310), the services supplied by Government were on a more generous scale, and they had led *inter alia* to a wide range of Co-operative activities, and to improved methods of cattle breeding and farming. The third factor was the province's connexion with the army, over half of which in times of peace came from within its borders. In the last war it contributed 775,000 men, most of them combatants.<sup>1</sup> No other province approached this record. As long as we were in the Punjab, we were constantly meeting soldiers, but after that rarely. Accordingly, it was in the Punjab that I was at special pains to discover what new ideas they had brought back with them from the war and whether their return was putting new life into the village.

In judging this point, one must distinguish between those who served abroad and those who never left India. For many of the latter, said a Tehsildar, the war was 'a picnic'—'a college life rather, in which they learnt to smoke and drink and go to the cinema', and far from having new ideas many 'have rather become silly'. It was very different with those who went abroad. But here again one must distinguish between those who went West and those who went East, and yet again between those who were taken prisoner by Japan in 1942 and those who fought against her later; and finally between officers and men.

To those who had seen the free countries of the West the desire for freedom was like new wine, and to the rank and

<sup>1</sup> New recruits numbered 613,000. The Punjab States provided another 90,000.

file freedom was one more boon to be granted by a grateful Government, to them still the giver of all good things. With those who had been taken prisoner in the Singapore *débâcle* and who had joined the Indian National Army, an acrid anti-British flavour made the wine all too potent. Even stronger was their resentment against the Japanese who, as they finally realized, used them only as tools for their own imperialistic purposes. One sound idea they brought back with them—that Hindu, Muslim and Sikh should work together without distinction of creed.

All naturally desired to retain the higher standard of living which they had enjoyed in the army, but for most, with their small holdings or with no holding at all, this was clearly going to be difficult. Many were wisely using their war bonuses to redeem ancestral acres. Others were buying land at fantastic prices. 'If there were land in Mars, we would go there', exclaimed someone who realized how little land there was to go round (81). Others still were living on their bonuses, wandering about and going to the cinema, but the bonus is no widow's cruse and anyone who remembered what happened after the first war could see that sooner or later there must be unrest, if not disturbance, unless the large plans for developing the province materialized in time. But there all calculations have been upset by partition.

'Soldiering is dry work, farming is earthy work', said one of the many soldiers who found farming the dirtier work of the two. One of the best things the army did for its recruits was to give them a strong desire for greater cleanliness, not only of person, but also of home and village. But how far were they prepared to make the necessary effort to achieve this? was a question I put to many good judges. One replied he had often heard the soldier praise conditions in other countries, but never had he heard him discuss how his own village could be improved. Another, speaking perhaps prophetically, said the soldier was of little use for constructive work but might be much more so for destructive. Most, however, agreed that he was more awake in mind, and that alone is an important change, for the road to a better way of life is blocked by

the peasant's ingrained inertia—as a young Sikh Captain found to his despair. He spent his first leave getting his village to tidy up the lanes, repair the wells, and clean the pond, and finally returned to duty 'utterly exhausted'. Six months later he came back to find not a sign of his work left, and he has never tried to do anything of the kind since. It is not easy for the few to rouse the many, and still more difficult to keep them roused, and it is only where the soldier is in strength or there are men of character actually living in the village, like the one mentioned on p. 43, that something can be expected. So far the change does not go much beyond a keener desire for education—many saw it was the educated soldier who 'gets jumps'—and a greater willingness to support measures for protecting health. But only a year had passed since the end of the war, and many thousand soldiers had still to be demobilized.

If the returned soldier can only make his neighbours keen for education, or at least less indifferent to it, he will have done his village no small service, for without education Government's welfare measures will be of little permanent value. Doctor and dispensary will be sought too late, covered drinking-well and paved lanes will not be repaired, the Co-operative society will stagnate, and even if the metalled road secures the peasant a better market for his produce, it will tempt him to waste time and money at cinema and law court. All these improvements are needed, and badly needed, but education is the need of needs. The peasant who, after learning to read and write, said 'I now know who I am', touched the essential point (144). Until a man knows who he is, he cannot know what he can be.

Where four out of five are illiterate and the fifth often only literate in name, it is not easy to gauge the effects of education, and questions about it mostly led to nebulous, if not pessimistic replies. It is still a much less powerful force than religion and custom, yet there are definite gains to its credit. The educated peasant, it was said, works more intelligently, and shows a tendency to take the lead in village life, and in one District (Gurgaon) the fact that charms were less in demand and earrings and bangles no longer worn by men was put down to education. Even on

the Frontier, where gentleness is hardly a virtue, there is less wife-beating (done with hand or shoe), and quail-, ram- and cock-fighting are on the decline. 'The Pathan', said one of them,<sup>1</sup> 'is now more of a man and less of an animal' (21), though another, remembering perhaps the many murders, declared, 'We are only fifteen annas human' (24).

If anyone doubts the good effect of education, he should visit the Hoshiarpur District with its 32 High Schools and village degree College. He could hardly fail to note its influence in the high standard of farming, in the varied activities of over 3,000 Co-operative societies, in the consolidation of innumerable fragmented holdings with the consent of all concerned—the high water mark of Indian Co-operation—and most of all perhaps in the receptive mentality of the people. Much the same might be said of the equally progressive colony District of Lyallpur. But in Hoshiarpur one evil had not yielded to education: the love of litigation was as strong as ever.

Many we met were critical of the type of education given. With more money, it would not be difficult to see how it could be improved—the standard of teacher is low, and also his pay—but the tour reinforced a conclusion to which I was led long ago in studying the more prosperous areas of the Punjab, that 'without education prosperity demoralizes'.<sup>2</sup> 'Give them 5,000 rupees', said the doctor at Palwal, 'and they will just throw it away' (190). And if they do not do this, it merely ends in larger families, already too large for the amount of land available.

#### IV—THE HOME<sup>3</sup>

In a country where three out of four live on the land, and intensive farming is at a discount, large families can only spell poverty, and, as I wrote over twenty years ago, their multiplication is 'the root cause of India's poverty'.<sup>3</sup> With the addition of nearly 100 millions to the population since, this can hardly be doubted, and it is significant that

<sup>1</sup> *The Punjab Peasant* (3rd ed.), p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to my daughter's diary for much of the information given in this Part.

<sup>3</sup> *The Punjab Peasant* (1st ed.), p. 287.



in the interval birth-control has taken root in the town. But the village is still as it was. Yet, and this would have been impossible twenty years ago, at one meeting the subject was spontaneously mentioned: characteristically by a Sikh, for more than any other community in the Punjab, the Sikhs realize the close connexion between the size of holding, family and purse. 'Too many children, hell' was the blunt way the tenth Sikh Guru put it 200 years ago (84), and it was Sikh Jats who after the first war were trying to limit their families by recourse to the devices of a midwife.<sup>1</sup> The feeling that there can be too many children is spreading. There was a hint of it in a Gond woman's remark: 'I wonder why God sends many to the poor who cannot feed them and only a few to the rich?' In more than one village it was definitely said that two were enough, and in another, that where there are more than four 'they go hungry'. In the more congested Districts the women are beginning to ask how their number can be kept down, and two Lady Welfare Workers we met said that in one District (Jullundur) they had been inundated with questions. Some women, it seems, are even prepared to undergo an operation rather than another confinement—one I heard of had already had nineteen children. Their only means of protection at present, and a very unsure one, is to nurse their children for two, if not three years.<sup>2</sup> More reliable methods are clearly desirable, but how far they are possible under existing conditions is very doubtful and primarily a question for doctors. Meanwhile it is something that in the last twenty years there has been a definite tendency to advance the age of marriage. But in the village it is still the almost universal view that birth is 'as God wills', and since life in India is highly precarious—recent events have not made it less so—it is considered better to have too many children than too few. As one Muslim put it, 'God knows how to weed them out' (100).

Considering the way the children come into the world, the miracle is that so many survive the weeding. The

<sup>1</sup> See *Rusticus*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> One mother claimed to have nursed her three sons for five years each but, she said, 'no woman can do that now'.

mother is delivered of her burden lying on the floor in the dark, with only an untouchable to help her. The one redeeming feature is the rest that follows, never less than a week and, if help is available, generally longer. But what can one expect with so few trained midwives available and so few educated mothers? If four out of five men are illiterate, with women it is a case of nineteen out of twenty. Even in progressive Hoshiarpur there are fifteen times as many High Schools for boys as for girls, a disproportion typical of every District and State we went through. 'We can hardly read and write,' said a Sikh Major's wife; 'what can we understand?' Certainly nothing new, and not much that is old. The darkness of a village woman's mind is only matched by the darkness of her house. The indifference of Local Boards to girls' education is to blame for this, but the indifference is largely a reflexion of peasant prejudice. Many will send their girls to temple or mosque for religious teaching, but most still question whether they should go to school. 'If she learns to read,' said a Punjabi of his daughter, 'she will be all ifs and buts (*agar magar*).' But not all are as unenlightened as this. In another village the women admitted that an educated wife was more respected by her husband, and now there are many young men who want a wife able at least to read and write. A new current has set in, and wherever it flows in any strength, as in many parts of the Punjab, schools have only to be opened to be filled; and until that is widely done, women must continue to be 'the great obstructionists' to village improvement.

Yet the obstruction is not quite what it was. Wherever the peasant is prosperous or the tie with the army is strong, change is at work, and it is most evident in the sphere of habit and fashion. In dress, lighter materials have taken the place of heavier, mill-made cloth of homespun, silk of cotton, and heeled shoes of slippers. So, too, with jewellery: one gold earring is worn instead of five or six silver ones, and the nose-ring and anklet have been renounced. In the house, the brick floor is found to be cleaner than the old-fashioned floor of mud plaster, and where there is a hand pump, courtyard and floor are periodically sprinkled

with water to keep down the dust. Furniture is more elaborate with the wicker chair in common use, crockery and cooking vessels more numerous with the tea-set as almost a necessity, and the words 'plate' and 'glass' are now good vernacular. Meals are served with greater regularity and in one household at least, if dinner is not ready by nine, the younger generation protests. Some of the girls are even giving up the pigtail for the half-length fashion of the West. Whence, indeed, most of these new ways spring; as, too, perhaps, the slackening in religious observance.

These changes are more characteristic of the country north than south of the Sutlej<sup>1</sup> and touch comfort rather than welfare. In the most advanced villages change touches both. In one situated in the Punjab, till fifteen years ago, said an Assistant Registrar who lives there, women had little or no voice in anything that was done, and all they bothered about was their clothes and their jewellery. Now, with a betrothal they have the last word, and when it comes to marriage they dictate the terms of the dowry, and if a new house is to be built, they have the bigger say. They owe this to a canal which has brought the village prosperity. Before it came, life was much harder; harder, too, were both men and women, and the women were 'ruthlessly beaten'. Now this is unheard of.

The most advanced village we saw in the United Provinces also owed something to the humanizing influence of water, in this case coming not from a canal but from one of Sir William Stampe's famous tube wells. There the women had actually formed a panchayat on lines akin to a Village Institute. Their aims were cleanliness of house and person, the settlement of disputes, and the discussion of common needs and problems. The effect of the last was vividly expressed in the whole-hearted reply to my daughter's question—do you want freedom? 'We all want it', they said, and the reason they gave was all their own. But here I must quote from my daughter's diary: "We don't wish to be in purdah. We don't want our

<sup>1</sup> In the United Provinces, and also farther south, every kind of ornament, mostly of silver or bell metal, was being worn even by the poorest, and the high prices had added greatly to the display.

men to come running to us whenever a stranger comes to our village and doing this"—here the woman speaking to me turned round and pulled the next woman's veil right over her face, and pushing down her head with both hands gave her a vigorous shove towards the door.'

This village was far ahead of most. Elsewhere purdah still had a tight hold upon those who observed it; upon Muslims under the influence of religion and family prestige; upon Hindus—generally Rajputs, Thakurs or Brahmins—under the influence of custom and caste. We met many Muslim officials, some of them highly educated men with well-educated wives, but I cannot recall one whose wife was out of purdah. One of them, when asked what he considered the worst change in the times, replied 'women going unveiled'. Another, speaking as a realist, said that men were not yet so civilized that it was safe for women to do this, a remark tragically illustrated by last year's savage doings. The most enlightened comment was made by a Muslim of the younger generation, who said, 'The only true purdah is that of the mind' (182). That his wife, too, was in purdah was due, as in so many cases, to her own wish. But there are signs of change. A Pathan we met said his daughters, who were all educated, hated being in purdah—the burqa, one of them said, is 'like a walking tent'—but they submit to it, for otherwise they would not get husbands. Another Muslim lady I met had been brought up so strictly that until the day of her marriage she never went out without a burqa, and when she went to school, a female servant went with her and was present throughout her lessons. But as soon as she was married, she came out of purdah. Even the burqa represents some advance. In the old days when Muslim ladies of consequence travelled, on alighting from the train, they were at once hidden from view by walls of canvas and shepherded thus to their carriages.

With the Hindu the veil takes the place of the burqa, and since religion is not involved, the way is more open to change than with the Muslim. Traditionally the veil should conceal the eyes and cover the mouth, but it now tends to be a little thinner and the least bit shorter, stopping perhaps at the tip of the nose instead of an inch or two

lower. How far change will go must depend on what happens to caste, and still more perhaps on what follows the *pax Britannica*. There seems little doubt that the growth of purdah was fostered by the insecurity due to repeated invasion and internal disorder. Security must always mean more to women than to men.

In the towns the position is one of sharp contrast between the Westernized intelligentsia of officialdom and commerce and the prosperous middle class. The former are as free in their ways as the West, and sometimes as ultra-modern ; but the Muslims amongst the latter, hugging tradition or wishing to establish a newly-acquired respectability, willingly embrace restraint, and the creation of a Muslim State is likely, for a time at least, to tighten the bond.

So much for the changes of fashion, habit and custom. Subtler and more far-reaching are the changes in personal relationship. Fifteen years ago I noted a tendency for the tie between husband and wife to become the pivot of family life rather than the tie between mother and son and I suggested that if it spread, it would be 'the profoundest change of all'.<sup>1</sup> It is still only a tendency, but stronger than it was, and it is reinforced by another change. Up to the first war the young rarely dared to question the views and ways of their elders. With the war came the first critical murmurs, swelling here and there in the years that followed to positive challenge, but in any difference of opinion the young had to give way to the old. Now, as in the West, it has begun to be the other way, and it is perhaps the biggest change that has taken place in the home during the last decade. The first to feel it is the mother-in-law. As with Government official and Brahmin, her authority is not what it was : a crack has appeared in her throne. The later age for marriage gives her a daughter-in-law less amenable to despotic rule, and there are clashes in which the mother-in-law is not always the one at fault. If the daughter-in-law has any education, often, too, if she has none, she demands a separate hearth, sometimes even a separate house. The Hindu joint-family system, with its regimentation of the young, is in fact disintegrating,

<sup>1</sup> *Wisdom and Waste*, p. 293.

and with it goes the whole *raison d'être* of the mother-in-law's authority.

The spirit of the times is also working, though less powerfully, against the husband. The Hindu wife is taught to obey her husband implicitly, to serve him unremittingly, and to worship him blindly ; in short, as a Brahmin said to us, to regard him as God. ' We are their cattle ' said one woman, and of the husbands in the Gurgaon District a lady doctor observed : ' It would break your heart to see how little they care for their wives ' (189). Yet here again education with its humanizing influence is at work and the wife is becoming a little more of a companion and a little less of a drudge.

Of one change at work in the town we found little or no trace in the village. Young man and maid have no voice in their mating, and, unless they are cousins or manage it on the sly, they do not see each other until they are wed. We came upon several surprising cases of this, but none more surprising than that of the Hindu lawyer who at the age of 36 married entirely as his mother directed, and his bride, though a B.A., did the same. A common enough case was that of a young Sikh Naib-Tehsildar who was betrothed at the age of 12 to a girl of 8 : when he married her six years later, he had not seen her since boyhood. ' Sir,' said another official who rode with us, ' I am modern man ', yet he had betrothed his daughter at four months to a young man not much older. In the village the love-match is unknown ; hence, it is claimed, the success of so many marriages ! But how much easier must marriage be where the rights are mainly on one side and the obligations on the other. Already there is a hint that education makes a wife less docile.

The later age for full marriage, as already suggested, tends in the same direction, and that is clearly a change for the better, leading, as it must, and as the women in one village admitted, to stronger children. In a High School visited in 1928 I found a boy of 13 who was already living with his child wife, and one of 16 who had lost both wife and daughter.<sup>1</sup> On this tour, in another High School in

<sup>1</sup> *Rusticus*, p. 58.

the same District, it is true that the youngest husband was only 10 years old and that ten per cent of the boys were technically married, but none of them was living with his wife and the percentage, said the headmaster, was much higher when his fifteen years' service began. Many of the very early marriages are due to a mother's anxiety to see her children suitably married. This is understandable in a country where life is uncertain, and doubly so in the case of boys where, as in the Punjab, there are many more boys than girls.

In one respect there is no change: marriage still costs at least a year's income, often much more.<sup>1</sup> The sum most commonly mentioned was two or three thousand rupees, and in no specific case was it less.<sup>2</sup> Allowing for the 300 per cent rise in prices, it was much the same as before the war, but if there had been more to buy, owing to the general prosperity it would probably have been higher.

The ordinary home is still without newspaper or wireless. The newspaper is penetrating the larger and more prosperous villages through the homes of the educated, but most have to go round to the local shopkeeper to pick up the news—or the shopkeeper's version of it. There are many reasons why the peasant should wish to be able to read, but ability to read the newspaper is not one of them. Spurred on by a certain type of politician, the vernacular press, with some honourable exceptions, has done far too much to spread the communal virus.

There is more to be said for the radio. In the Punjab the wireless was beginning to make its appearance in the village, but only in the houses of army officers, the landed gentry, and the more highly educated. Few could afford the price, and the servicing of the battery was a further difficulty. But in the central Punjab the keenness was such that many Co-operative societies had applied for sets.

That their spread is slow need not be too keenly regretted. The remark of the headman who, when asked whether his

<sup>1</sup> In Gwalior, for example, the minimum for even the poorest was put at Rs. 500.

<sup>2</sup> In a village in Attock each side had spent Rs. 2,500; in Gwalior, a Brahmin had spent the same; in the U.P., a land-owner with two ploughs had spent Rs. 2,500 on marrying a sister; and another, also with only two ploughs, had spent Rs. 4,000. All these were recent marriages.

village had one, said, 'No, and that is why we have no disturbances, for we hear nothing,' is not without point (51). As to the cinema, it was rarely mentioned at a village meeting or in talk with others about the village, and we came upon no clear trace of its influence on village life. But it was not one of the subjects to which I gave special attention, and it is significant that Mahatma Gandhi spoke of its influence with horror.

## V—CONCLUSION

I have now touched on all the more important changes noticed on our tour. Though they varied greatly in degree from village to village, as a whole they were not negligible, and there was more to put on the asset side than many supposed. Fundamentally, however, the peasant is unchanged. Even when he found himself at freedom's door, and a little dazzled by what he saw beyond, he still desired security rather than liberty—the security that allowed him to till his land in peace, to reap where he sowed, to feed and clothe his family undisturbed, to walk lane and high road unmolested, and when wronged to obtain swift redress. Only less strong is the desire, as he put it more than once, to be cherished; that is, to be protected from those who would exploit him and to be assisted when overwhelmed by calamity. Disease and death are never far from his door, and flood, drought or blight never far from his fields. Powerless to control them, he views all change with suspicion and with the inertia born of a fatalistic outlook and an enervating climate. But where canal or tube well assures him a steady supply of water, the new sense of having some control over his harvest is making him less of a fatalist, and in the Punjab, under the further influence of the army, education and the demands of a rapidly increasing population, inertia was giving way, here and there, to a more receptive outlook. The best judges measured the change at two to four annas in the rupee, and instanced the willingness of many peasants to contribute to the cost of consolidating their holdings or paving their lanes, or to join together to protect soil and forest from erosion. But



in most villages apathy is still the governing factor. Roads, tanks, embankments, dispensaries, schools—all are cheerfully accepted when provided by Government free of cost, but it is still only a tiny minority that are prepared to obtain and maintain them by their own effort.

‘We are more interested in the peasant’, said Pundit Nehru on a recent occasion, ‘than in any other group of human beings’.<sup>1</sup> That is an encouraging change in the attitude of the Central Government and in line with Atatürk’s motto—The Peasant First—and if wisely applied it might be the beginning of a new era for the Indian peasant. But the object must not be quick results. That way lies disappointment, and not in India only. ‘Only by a long process of education can the mass of the small and middle peasantry be drawn into systematic and collective effort for improving conditions of life’ is the view of a Communist Minister in Yugoslavia after studying the Yugoslav peasant.<sup>2</sup> Many chafe at the meagre results achieved in India during the last thirty years in terms of the money and effort expended, and some, looking to what Russia has done, would apply ‘the stick’. Not so the Communist Minister just quoted. ‘The most important thing’, he said, is that all improvements should be carried out ‘with the will and common effort of the peasants’, and he adds the trenchant remark: ‘if this is true for the mass of the workers, it is ten times as true for the peasant.’ My own experience long ago led me to the same conclusion. One reason why the results have been so meagre is that the peasant’s co-operation was not secured. Many thought they knew his needs better than he did himself, and pressed upon him schemes, methods and nostrums in which he saw expenditure but not advantage. The same mistake was made in the Dutch East Indies. What is needed is a closer study of his mind and environment and the handling of his needs and difficulties by men gifted with understanding and patience and imbued with respect for his worth.

It is easy to belittle or to glorify the peasant. The difficulty is to see him as he is. In India, dominated by

<sup>1</sup> Address to the Associated Chambers of Commerce on 15 December 1947.

<sup>2</sup> Article by Edward Kardelj in *Kommunist*, see *New Statesman*, 28 February 1948.

his hard restricted way of life, he is often quarrelsome and sometimes vindictive, and to the townsman he must always appear ignorant, stupid and brutish, and the tragic events of last year show how brutishness may turn into savagery. 'If he runs amuck,' says the Punjab proverb of the Jat, 'it takes God to hold him.' On the other hand, poor as he is, he grudges his guest nothing, and he has the courtesy

Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds  
With smoky rafters, than in tap'stry halls.

With this courtesy goes a simplicity and a lack of self-consciousness which the more sophisticated might well envy. Unlike most of us in the West, he is still close to nature, and from his unceasing toil and sweat in her despotic service and patient submission to her ever-changing decrees are born, as the years pass, a gravity and dignity not often found in the townsman. No doubt he lacks education, but untouched by its refinements his values are clean-cut and, even when not observed, are always honoured; and his very illiteracy gives him an originality of thought and expression denied to most of us who read. Who but a peasant could have summed up the result of learning to read in the six words 'I now know who I am'? Those who would help him must also know who he is, and it was in an attempt to do this that my tour was undertaken.

<sup>1</sup> Risley, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

## Appendix

### NOTE ON WAGES AND PRICES, 1946-7

#### DOMESTIC

<i>Monthly wage</i> paid to servants :	Rs.
Bearer	70
Cook	60
Driver of truck	70
Head groom	45
Second groom	35
Third groom	35

Each servant received in addition a travelling allowance of Re. 1/8 a day in the case of the first three, and Re. 1 in the case of the others.

#### *Prices :*

Charcoal—from Rs. 2 a maund<sup>1</sup> (Jhansi District) to Rs. 8 (Agra).

Wood—from 8 annas to Rs. 2/8 a maund.

<i>For the Stable :</i>	Rs. per maund
Oats	18
Gram	8 to 9/9, but not always procurable
Bran	7 to 9
Crushed barley	7 to 9 (Rs. 18 at Saugor)
Shoeing—Rs. 4 a horse	
Clipping—Rs. 3	
Bedding for three horses—Rs. 5	

#### AGRICULTURAL PRICES AND WAGES

If black market prices are taken into consideration, agricultural prices were three to four times as high as in 1939. The big rise came in 1942-3 and conferred a sudden prosperity on the cultivator, enabling him to pay off a large amount of his debt. But by 1946-7 he was beginning to have to replace old stock at rates corresponding with those he was getting for his produce, and it was only a matter of time before he must lose most of the advantage gained by the rise. Where harvests had been poor, the high prices had already ceased to be a blessing.

<sup>1</sup> One maund (40 seers) is 82.28 lb.

*A Cultivator's Equipment :*

The following figures were given me in a village near Agra :

	Rs.
House	700-800
Two bullocks	1,000
Milch buffalo	300 (or 200 for cow)
Cart	250-300 (125 before the war)
Plough	15
Leveller	10
Leather bucket for well ( <i>charsa</i> )	60
Well ropes	15
Chaff-cutter	85-100 (only two out of ten cultivators present had one ; no one had a harrow)
Bedstead	5
Hoe	1
Total	Rs. 2,441-2,506

*Food :*

Eggs— $1\frac{1}{2}$  annas an egg in the village (Punjab and N.W.F.P.) ( $\frac{1}{2}$  anna before the war).

Ghi—Rs.  $4\frac{1}{4}$  to Rs. 5 a seer.<sup>1</sup>

Milk—round Delhi bought in the village at  $2\frac{3}{4}$  seers a rupee (Rs. 15 a maund) and sold in Delhi (duly watered) at Rs. 18 a maund.

Sugar—in the black market up to Rs. 2 a seer in the Central Provinces and to Rs. 3 in the N.W. Frontier Province ; the controlled price was between 8 annas and a rupee.

*Wages of Agricultural Workers :*

These varied in value from Rs. 200 to about Rs. 450 a year according to locality, but in most areas they were round about Rs. 300 as against about Rs. 100 before the war. The following are some specimen wages :

N.W.F.P.—Swabi tehsil—one quarter or one-fifth of the produce plus two meals a day.

Punjab—Sangla area (a rich colony tract)—Rs. 250 in cash, plus two meals a day and clothes, total value about Rs. 400.

<sup>1</sup> About 2 lb.

United Provinces—near Saharanpur—25 maunds of grain, one of gur, fodder for one milch animal, and one meal a day, total value about Rs. 300. Near Meerut the equivalent of about Rs. 450 was being paid in one village, and Rs. 430 in another (see pp. 165 and 173 footnote<sup>1</sup>).

Gwalior—near Dabra—Rs. 15 a month, plus two meals a day (value about Rs. 10 a month) and shoes, in all worth about Rs. 300. Before the war the amount paid in cash was Rs. 5.

Central Provinces—Malthone (a remote area in the Vindhya)—55 seers a month plus clothes, blanket and shoes, i.e. about Rs. 200 a year. Near Saugor the wage in cash and kind was about Rs. 315, and near Tejgarh, where cigarette-making was drawing labour away from the fields, it amounted to about Rs. 340.

## GLOSSARY

AKALIS	the stricter and more ardent followers of the Sikh religion.
ANNA	one-sixteenth of a rupee.
AZADI	freedom.
BANIA	Hindu shopkeeper.
BEGAR	labour obligatory by custom, cf. <i>corvée</i> .
BER	<i>Zizyphus jujuba</i> .
BORAH	an important Muslim mercantile community.
BURQA	cotton cloak with hood concealing the person from head to foot and worn in public by Muslim ladies who observe <i>purdah</i> ; the hood has eye-holes.
CHAPATI	a flat girdle cake of unleavened bread.
CHARPOY	a wooden bedstead covered with netted string or webbing.
DACOIT	gangster.
DACOITY	robbery by an armed gang.
DHOTI	a long strip of cloth tied round the waist and hanging down to the knees with the ends passed between the legs and fastened at the back; worn by Hindus.
DURRIE	cotton carpet or rug.
GHI	clarified butter.
GRAM	a pulse ( <i>Cicer arietinum</i> ).
GUJAR	a large semi-pastoral tribe, partly Muslim, partly Hindu.
GUR	unrefined sugar.
GURDWARA	a Sikh place of worship.
GURU	a religious leader or teacher, either Hindu or Sikh.
HAKHEEM	a doctor practising the Yunani system of medicine, generally a Muslim.
JAT	the largest agricultural tribe in the Punjab.
KANUNGO	a subordinate land revenue official intermediate between <i>patwari</i> and <i>Tehsildar</i> .
KATHA	a ceremonious reading in public of the Hindu scriptures.
KHAN	in the North-West Frontier Province a Pathan landlord, otherwise a Muslim title of respect.
KHATRI	an important trading and banking caste, the members of which may be either Hindu or Sikh.
MAHANT	the head of a Hindu or Sikh shrine.
MAUND	82·28 lb.
NAIB-TEHSILDAR	a Deputy-Tehsildar.
NEEM	<i>Melia indica</i> .

PANCHAYAT	a village board for settling disputes and administering village affairs.
PATHAN	the most important Muslim tribe in the North-West Frontier Province.
PATWARI	the village accountant, whose main duty is to keep the village land revenue records up to date.
PIPAL	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> .
PIR	a Muslim religious leader.
PURDAH	the seclusion of women ; literally a veil.
RAPE	<i>Brassica campestris</i> var. <i>glauca</i> .
RUPEE	worth 1s. 6d. and contains sixteen annas.
SADHU	a Hindu who professes to be an ascetic.
SARDAR	a title of respect commonly applied, though not confined to Sikhs.
SEER	one-fortieth part of a maund, about 2 lb.
SHISHAM	<i>Dalbergia sisso</i> .
SUBEDAR	an infantry officer holding the Viceroy's Commission.
TEHSILDAR	the official in charge of one of the three or more tehsils into which every district in Northern India is divided.
TONGA	a two-wheeled pony cart.
TULSI	<i>Occimum sanctum</i> .
ZAILDAR	the headman of a group of Punjab villages.

# INDEX

The following abbreviations are used :

C.P. for Central Provinces

N.W.F.P. for North-West Frontier Province

Pb. for Punjab

U.P. for United Provinces

- Abdul Ghafar Khan, 12, 15, 16, 24  
 Mabud Khan, 161  
 Abdullapur, 139  
 Abhana, 275  
 Aborigines, 268 ff, 282-3  
 Abul Fazal, 238  
 Abupur, visit to, 171  
 Account-keeping, 43  
 Acquisitive spirit, growth of, 294, 325, 332  
 Acton, Lord, quoted, 324  
 Actors, 275  
 Administration, ch. xii  
 and the British, 308  
 Congress, 11, 12  
 Ministers, 308  
 politics, 117  
 touring, 110, 309  
 in Indian States, 127-9, 133, 321 ff  
 knowledge of, 311-12  
 in Pb., 38  
 in U.P., 146, 151, 156, 212, 217  
 under Provincial autonomy, 308, 310  
 (See Clerks, Deputy Commissioner, Officials)  
 Adult suffrage, 314  
 Advertisements, 103, 256  
 Agricultural Departments, 8, 276, 279, 311  
 implements, 23, 43, 260, 276, 285  
 improvements, 43  
 labourers, 327 (n)  
 wages of, 351-2  
 in C.P., 285  
 in U.P., 166 (n), 173 (n)  
 Ahirs, 183  
 Ahimsa, 168, 187, 263, 332  
 Akalis, 104, 123  
 Alexander the Great, 27, 91, 216  
 Ambala, 134  
 Ambedkar, Dr, 327  
 Amrit Kaur, Rajkumari, 293  
 Anti-erosion measures, 51  
 Arains, 83  
 Arms, 29, 37, 109  
 Army in Pb., 336 ; Pb. States, 336 (n)  
 influence of, 54-5, 60, 190, 336-8  
 (See Cleanliness, Education, Soldiers)  
 Art, see Paintings  
 A.'s diary quoted, 122-3, 153 (n), 161 (n), 339 (n), 342-3  
 Astrologer, 218  
 Atatürk's motto, 243, 348  
 Attlee, Mr, statement by, xiii, 304, 307  
 knowledge of, 275-6, 281, 283  
 reactions to, in C.P., 277, 286, 290 ; Pb., 305  
 Attock district, 49  
 Aurungzeb, 229  
 Azad, Maulana, 15, 323 (n)  
 Bacon quoted, 85, 136, 321  
 Badrinath, 224  
 Bahawalpur, 80-1  
 Bajah, 23  
 Bajra, price of, 45  
 Bakr-Id, 31 (n)  
 Balachaur, meetings at, 104-6  
 Balkassar, 50  
 Baloch, 158  
 Bamboo, uses of, 271  
 Bangles, 194  
 Banias, 117, 121, 136  
 (See Money-lender)  
 Bansi, 250, 311 (n)



- Banyan tree, 130, 162  
 Baptist mission, 189  
 Barber, 72  
 Barley, shortage of, 267  
 Basant Panchami, 185  
 Basic education, 164, 174, 295  
 Bawara, meeting at, 155  
 Beant Singh, S.B. Sardar, 89-91, 96  
 Beas, 91-2  
 Beauty, feeling for, 76, 126, 211  
     in architecture, 107, 148, 162, 183, 193  
     in houses, 82-3, 187  
*Begari*, 279  
 Belgian Father, 78  
 Bengal, Eastern, xi, 19, 86, 170, 294  
 Bengalis, 10  
 Ber fruit, 247  
 Betrothal, age of, 73  
 Bharatpur City, 207  
     State, 199 (n)  
         complaints against, 199, 200, 202  
         conditions in, 200, 203, 210  
 Bhatias, 77  
 Bhatti Rajputs, 76  
 Bhats, 116, 134, 165  
 Bicycles, in Pb., 67, 111, 180, 182, 185, 336  
     in Gwalior, 235  
     touring on, 132, 135, 142, 145, 179, 191, 255  
*Bigha, cutcha*, 122 (n) ; *pukka*, 186(n)  
 Bihar, landlord in, 48  
     massacre in, xi, 15, 19, 62, 86, 170  
 Bikaner State, land bought in, 80-1  
 Bir Singh, 238  
 Birdha, 253  
*Biri* cigarettes in C.P., 273, 276, 283-4, 286, 291, 334  
 Birpur, 145  
 Birth control, 63, 72, 84, 99, 138-9, 190, 205, 340  
     (See Childbirth)  
 Black market, 317-18  
     in Bharatpur, 200  
     in C.P., 284  
     in Gwalior, 231, 234  
     in Pb., 35, 50, 56-7  
 Black market in U.P., 212, 214, 253  
     (See Cloth, Matches, Prices, Sugar, Wheat, Yarn)  
 Blacksmith, 72  
 Bombay Presidency, 315, 328 (n)  
 Borahs, 211, 277  
 Bose, Subhas Chandra, 151, 217, 289  
 Boundary Commission, 306  
 Brahmins, 295, 328-9  
     and drama, 275  
     in C.P., 282, 285  
     in Pb., 77, 104  
     in States, 201, 208, 223  
     in U.P., 149, 157, 164-5, 167, 173, 188, 217-18, 252  
     (See Genealogies, Horoscopes)  
 Brayne, F. L., 184, 189, 204  
 Bribery, see Corruption  
 Brides, price of, 8, 22  
 Bridges, 226, 236  
 British, antagonism to, xii, 12, 15, 17-18, 154, 180, 190  
     character of, 11, 18, 50, 125  
     needed, 303-4  
         in C.P., 281, 286, 290  
         in Bharatpur, 208-9  
         in N.W.F.P., 18, 29-31  
         in Pb., 50-1, 78-9, 137, 185, 194, 307  
         in U.P., 217  
         as equals, 52, 105  
     officers, 52, 125, 141, 197, 221  
     policy of, xiii, 34, 39, 52, 70, 229  
     rule, 15, 17-18, 39, 121, 255  
 Bryce, Lord, quoted, 313  
 Buch Kalan, meeting at, 71  
 Buffaloes, 82, 204, 225, 245  
     price of, in Bharatpur, 205  
     in Pb., 245  
     in U.P., 147  
 Bullocks in Pb., 100, 245  
     price of, in Pb., 180  
     in States, 205, 225  
     in U.P., 158  
     racing, 189  
     respect for, 173, 332  
     sale of, 168, 231

- Bulls, 70, 133, 189  
     scrub, 276  
 Bundelkhand, 244, 247  
     people of, 249, 255  
*Burqa*, 59, 60, 74, 343  
 Buses, 3, 142, 170, 204, 336  
 Buttermilk, 53, 137, 146, 215  
  
 Cabinet Delegation, xi, 28, 302  
 Calcutta, disturbances in, xi  
     ration cards in, 321  
 Canal, Harsi, 235  
     Lower Jhelum, 65  
     Swat, 7  
     Western Jumna, 139  
 Canal colonies, 65  
     starting of, 79, 81, 83  
 Capital, lack of, 44, 272  
 Carts, price of, 206  
 Caste, 107, 167, 288, 329-30  
     effect of, 236  
     (See Brahmins, Untouchability)  
 Cattle, adornment of, 218, 225  
     herding of, 127, 194  
     housing of, 129, 163  
     in N.W.F.P., 8  
     in States, 127, 204, 231  
     inoculation of, 263  
     price of, 225  
     (See Buffaloes, Bulls, Bullocks, Cows)  
 Cattle breeding in Pb., 37, 112, 189  
 Chairs, 49, 172, 257, 342  
 Chakwal, 51, 61  
 Chambal, 223  
 Chamkaur, 111-12  
 Change, ch. xiii  
     factors making for, 325  
     in India, 220-1, 294  
     in Lyallpur colony, 82  
     in Pb., 49, 59, 74, 90, 120  
     in U.P., 258  
     (See Standard of living)  
 Charms, 37, 46, 194  
 Charpoy, 7  
 Charsadda, 3, 4  
 Chenab, 74-6  
 Chhotu Ram, Sir, 194, 199, 201 (n)  
 Childbirth, 138, 190, 340-1  
 Children, number of, 17, 72, 84, 190  
     nursing of, 340  
 Chimneys, 58  
 Choa Saidan Shah, 58  
 Churchill, Mr Winston, quoted, 62, 301  
 Churning, 60  
 Cigarettes, *see Biris*  
 Cinema, 55, 294, 347  
 Civil Supplies Department, 56, 195, 197, 316  
 Civil war, fear of, xiii, 31, 78, 101, 105, 185, 301-2  
     if necessary, 39, 140  
 Cleanliness and army, 43, 107  
     and poverty, 42, 269  
     and towns, 130  
     and village, 46, 184, 193, 238, 278, 281  
 Clerks, power of, 8  
 Cloth, allowance of, in Pb., 35, 38, 69  
     amount of, required, 35, 57, 231 (n)  
     distribution of, 241, 248, 319  
     price of, 57  
     shortage of, in Pb., 38, 45, 55, 66  
         in States, 202, 204, 231, 234  
         in U.P., 144, 214, 241, 243, 259  
 Clothes, washing of, 192-3, 215, 258  
     (See Dress)  
 Cock-fighting, 8  
 Co-education, 99, 217, 276  
 Coimbatore canes, 7, 192-3, 235  
 Collector, 130, 151, 174  
     (See Deputy Commissioner)  
 Columella quoted, 8, 48  
 Communal antagonism, xi, xii  
     and education, 111  
     and press, 346  
     in C.P., 274  
     in Gwalior, 227-8  
     in N.W.F.P., 13, 18-19, 31  
     in Pb., 47, 52, 78, 86, 117, 181, 195  
     in U.P., 169-71  
     (See Massacres)  
 Communal harmony, 104, 111  
     in States, 323  
 Communists in Pb., 121-4, 126, 195

- Conciliation Boards in C.P., 262, 272 (n)  
 Congress and nomination, 257-8  
 and I.N.A., 190  
 complaints against, in C.P., 265, 281  
     in N.W.F.P., 13, 29  
     in Pb., 124, 184, 198  
     in States, 200, 205, 209  
     in U.P., 144, 155, 173, 214, 252  
 in C.P., 279, 286  
 in N.W.F.P., 12, 23  
 in States, 130, 202  
 in U.P., 151  
 representatives of, 320  
     in C.P., 279  
     in N.W.F.P., 15, 23  
     in U.P., 174, 211-12, 240, 251, 253, 257  
 Consolidation, *see* Holdings  
 Constituent Assembly, xi, 39, 88, 114 (n), 173  
 Contentment and progress, 323  
 Control system, 318, 320-1  
     in C.P., 280  
     in N.W.F.P., 13, 24  
     in Pb., 50, 56, 62, 71, 82, 94, 184  
     in U.P., 173, 217  
     (*See* Cloth, Matches, Sugar)  
 Cooking vessels, 144  
 Co-operative farming, 233  
     officials, 249  
     Societies, 315  
         in C.P., 276, 278, 284  
         in N.W.F.P., 28, 31  
         in Pb., 51, 96, 98 102, 112-13, 119, 320, 339  
         in States, 133, 224, 238  
         in U.P., 144, 157, 172, 180, 210, 214, 249  
         (*See* Holdings, Interest rates, Village banks)  
 Corruption, 316  
     in Calcutta, 321  
     in C.P., 280  
     in N.W.F.P., 23  
     in Pb., 41, 47, 56, 62, 66, 89, 117, 184, 195, 197  
     in States, 128, 133, 186, 199, 200, 205, 232  
     in U.P., 162, 169, 184, 214-15, 259  
 Cotton, 258  
 Cripps, Sir Stafford, 63 (n)  
 Cows, price of, 225  
     respect for, 31, 168, 173, 225, 227, 331-2  
     sale of, 168, 231, 276  
     treatment of, 231  
 Dacoity, 232  
 Dak bungalows, 266  
 Damkana, meeting at, 246  
 Damoh Sub-division, 274 (n)  
 Dancing girls, 8, 21  
 Dasuya, 94  
 Datia, 237-9  
 Daughters, birth of, 116, 192  
     inheritance of, 22  
 Daughters-in-law, 153, 160, 189, 344  
 Debt, 262, 272, 333  
     (*See* Conciliation Boards)  
 Debt Legislation, 45, 201 (n), 211  
 Deeg, 205  
 Delhi, xi, 174  
 Democracy, 17, 41, 251, 257, 324  
     and communalism, 199  
     and illiteracy, 311-12  
 de Nerval, Gérard, quoted, 280  
 Deposits, 249  
 Deputy Commissioner, 12, 13, 24, 109, 130, 140-1, 180, 197  
 Deva, 163 (n)  
 Dhamai, 103  
 Dhanni cattle, 37  
 Dharobi, meeting at, 49  
 Dhok Pathan, 43  
 Dholpur, Maharaja of, 220-2, 324  
     State, 218  
     conditions in, 218-19  
 Dhobi, 54, 204  
     price of, 209  
 Diet in C.P., 269  
     in Dholpur, 219  
     in Gwalior, 225-6, 230  
     in Pb., 82, 137, 333  
     in Swat, 10

- Diet in U.P., 146-7, 215, 245  
 Disease, 31, 138, 190  
     (See Plague)  
 Dispensaries in C.P., 263, 274 (n),  
     276, 278  
     in Gwalior, 224, 235  
     in Pb., 65, 192  
     in U.P., 172, 217, 251, 260  
 Distillation, illicit, 90  
 District Boards, 170  
 Disturbances, 228  
     insurance against, 171  
     (See Massacres, Stabbings)  
 Diwali, 225  
 Doctors, 65, 278  
     (See Hakeems)  
 Domination, fear of, xii, 302  
 Dowry, 116  
 Dress, 334-5  
     in Pb., 41-2, 54, 61, 98, 120  
     in States, 204, 231  
     in U.P., 153, 215, 248, 258  
     (See Shoes)  
 Drinking in Pb., 89, 90, 186  
     in U.P., 244-5, 260  
 Drought, 56  
 Dudial, 57  
 Dukhwan, 244  
 Dung cakes, 213  
 Dutch East Indies, 348  
     (See Java)  
 Dwarka, 223-4  
 Earrings, 61, 194  
 Ebony tree, 273  
 Education, 338-9  
     adult, 143-4  
     and Army, 99, 338  
     and consolidation of holdings, 173  
     and religion, 21  
     and service, 21, 194  
     basic, 164, 174, 295  
     compulsory, 67, 119, 311  
     desire for, 8, 44, 54, 173  
     difficulties of, 119, 274, 276, 283,  
         311  
     effects of, 338-9, 345  
         in Pb., 102, 111  
     Education, effects of, in U.P., 173  
         for girls, 44, 54, 59, 70, 99, 101,  
             221, 341  
     importance of, 67, 190, 338  
     indifference to, 21, 67, 119, 134,  
         269  
     in Sikh States, 127, 133-4  
     in U.P. village, 169  
     objections to, 21, 67, 119, 194,  
         221  
     Educated villagers, 43, 96, 160, 172,  
         278, 280, 289  
 Eggs, 147, 217, 277-8, 333  
 Election, indirect, advocated, 313-14  
 Elections, expenditure on, 85, 313  
     results of, xii, 197, 265, 299  
 Elephant, 282  
 Emigration, 102  
 Erosion, *see* Anti-erosion  
 Etah, 188  
 Evil eye, 95  
 Exploitation, 75, 249, 294  
 Extravagance, 8, 21, 190  
 Faction, 68-9, 314  
 Fairs, 8, 169  
 Family trees, 77, 116, 149, 165  
 Famine, 255 (n)  
 Faridkot State, 30  
 Farming equipment, 351  
 Fasts, 21, 238  
 Fatalism, 63, 206-7, 347  
 Fatehpur Sikri, 209-10  
 Fertilizers, 276, 279  
 Finance and character, 190  
 Fireplaces, 107, 154  
 Food, price of, 351  
     (See Diet)  
 Food-grains, shortage of, in C.P.,  
     265, 267  
     in Pb., 36, 38, 45, 50, 55-6, 66  
     in U.P., 254  
 Forced labour, 279-80  
 Forts, 109, 246, 252, 267  
 Fowls, *see* Poultry  
 Fragmentation, 260, 272  
     (See Holdings)  
 France, 50

- Freedom, 299-301, 304  
     already enjoyed or lost, 105, 207-9,  
         217, 252  
     considered premature in C.P., 286,  
         290  
         in N.W.F.P., 18  
         in Pb., 35, 50, 78, 192, 197-8,  
             303  
     desire for in C.P., 277  
         in N.W.F.P., 15  
         in Pb., 55, 80, 98, 113, 183, 197,  
             228  
         in States, 132, 228  
         in U.P., 144, 152, 173, 240  
     desired with qualifications, 71, 83,  
         98, 105, 137, 159  
     economic, 255  
     in Pb., 261  
     meaning of, 104, 117, 300  
     use of, 16, 30, 101  
     (See Civil war, Massacres, Taxa-  
         tion, Women)
- Gadwara, meeting at, 150  
 Gali Jagir, 38  
 Gambling, 294  
 Games, 259  
 Gandhi, Mahatma  
     and controls, 321 (n)  
     and monkeys, 333  
     and salt tax, 62 (n)  
     and untouchability, 121, 194, 227,  
         327  
     as leader, 15, 36, 159, 212, 217,  
         221, 290  
     attitude towards, 194, 286, 312  
     influence of, 305  
     interview with, 293 ff  
     quoted, 303  
 Ganges, 147, 149, 169, 224  
 Gardens, *see* Orchards  
 Garhakota, 271  
 Garhi, 115  
 Garhi Bazidpur, 183  
 Garhmuktesar, 169, 185, 197  
 Garshankar, meeting at, 101  
 Genealogies, 77, 116, 149, 165  
 Germany, 50
- Ghaggar, 131-2  
*Ghaggra*, 274  
 Ghi, 23 (n), 215  
     price of, 120, 208, 258  
 Ghiljai women, 4  
 Girls, *see* Daughters, Education,  
     Schools  
 Goats, 230, 267-8  
 God, attitude towards, 270, 289, 331  
     (See Religion)  
 Goldsmiths, 67, 211, 226, 251  
 Gona, 257  
 Gonds, 268 ff, 282-3  
*Gowshala*, 168  
 Gram, 55  
     price of, 266  
 Grand Trunk Road, 134, 191  
*Grantbi*, 113 (n)  
*Granth Sahib*, 113 (n)  
 Grazing areas, closing of, 110  
 Greece, 232  
 Greeting, forms of, 4, 103 (n), 217,  
     249, 276-7  
 Grinding, 25, 145, 206, 246, 269, 294  
 Guest-houses, 126, 227, 237  
 Gugera, 187  
 Gujars, 109, 145, 155, 157  
 Gujranwala district, 61, 123  
 Gujrat district, 65  
 Gur, 4 (n), 7, 57  
     price of, in C.P., 284, 319  
     in Pb., 184  
     in U.P., 234, 243  
 Gurdaspur, 87, 89  
*Gurdwara*, 103, 113  
 Gurgaon, 180  
     district, disturbances in, 181 (n),  
         198, 303  
     Experiment, 189  
 Guru, 282  
     Govind Singh, 84  
     Nanak, 95, 107  
*Guy Mannerling* quoted, 36 (n), 46,  
     225  
 Gwalior Fort, 226-7  
     Maharaja of, 230  
     State, 222 ff  
     killing in, 229 (n)

- Hakeem*, 48, 93  
 Halal, 91, 330  
*Halwa*, 161 (n)  
 Hardwar, 77, 148-9  
 Haryana, 96  
 Haripur, 32  
 Harsi lake, 235  
*Hartal*, 205  
 Hazara, 26  
     disturbances in, 76 (n), 170  
 Health, 138, 190  
     (See Disease)  
 Hedges, 127  
 Hens, *see* Poultry  
 Herbert, Dr, 190  
 Hindu and Muslim in India, 15, 16  
     in N.W.F.P., 19  
     in Pb., xii (n), 45, 52, 140  
     in Gwalior, 229  
 Hindu and Sikh, 45, 197  
     joint family system, 344  
     ties with Muslim and Sikh, 76-7,  
         100, 116, 119, 134, 302  
 Hindus and religion, 188  
     (See *Abimsa*, Cows, Monkeys,  
         Temples)  
 Hiran river, 284  
 Hissar bulls, 189  
     district, 163, 165  
 Hoarding, 226  
 Holdings, consolidation of, in Pb.,  
     30, 112, 119, 127, 300, 339  
     in U.P., 143, 165, 173, 260  
     (See Fragmentation)  
 Holdings in N.W.F.P., 23, 31  
     in Pb., 80-1, 84, 102, 112  
     one-plough, 216, 218, 225, 255  
 Holi, 269, 271-2, 274  
 Home, change in, 339 ff  
 Homespun, 82, 120, 145, 258  
 Hookah, 7, 119, 191, 273, 334  
 Horoscopes, 76, 116, 164-5  
 Horsemen, 24, 35, 49, 246, 265, 267  
 Horses for racing, 47  
     for touring, 3, 4, 5, 6, 52-3, 110,  
         201  
 Hoshiarpur district, cattle in, 100,  
     127  
 Hoshiarpur district, co-operation in,  
     102  
     education in, 98-9, 339, 341  
     emigration from, 102  
     litigation in, 339  
 Hospitality, 111, 172  
     (See Peasant)  
 Hospitals, 31, 189, 238  
     (See Dispensaries)  
 Houses, 335  
     brick (*pukka*), 82, 103, 110, 226  
     cost of, 119, 154, 174  
     in C.P., 268-9, 281-2  
     in Pb., 42-3, 107, 138, 183-4, 187,  
         193  
     in States, 129, 203, 226, 238  
     in U.P., 142, 144, 148, 157, 174,  
         212, 216, 246, 250  
     shortage of, 138, 226  
     (See Paintings)  
 Husband and wife, *see* Wives  
 Huxley, Aldous, 222  
 Hyat-Khan, Sardar Shaukat, 36  
     Sir Sikander, 39 (n)  
 Hygiene, 190, 295  
     (See Health)  
 Illiteracy, 311, 341  
 Imam, 65  
 India (old style)  
     desire for republic in, 173, 228-30  
     for united, 111, 140  
     maintenance in, 235  
     sacred rivers of, 287-8  
 Indian National Army (I.N.A.), 151,  
     190, 337  
     Civil Service, 125  
     States, *see* States  
 Indus, 25-7  
 Industry, domestic, *see* *Biri*  
 Inoculation, 138  
*Insaf*, meaning of, 39, 40  
 Intelligentsia and caste, 288, 330  
     and inter-dining, 91, 167  
     and intermarriage, 167-8, 288  
     and peasant, 221  
     and politics, xiii  
     and purdah, 344

- Intelligentsia and religion, 288  
 Interest rates in Bharatpur, 201, 203  
     in C.P., 262, 286  
     in N.W.F.P., 17  
     in Pb., 203  
     in U.P., 211, 249  
 Inter-dining, 167, 330  
 Intermarriage, 167-8, 288  
 Irrigation, *see* Canals, Salts, Wells  
 Italy, 120
- Jagadhri, 134, 137  
 Jagannath, 223-4, 260  
*Jai Hind*, 180 (n)  
     *Ram*, 277  
 Jai Prakash Narain, 159  
 Jainpura, 184  
 Jains, 239, 263-4, 275  
 Janglis, 67-8, 71, 75, 77, 81, 83-4  
 Japanese, 190  
 Jats, Bagri, 186  
     in Gurgaon, 181, 184, 194  
 Java, 236-7  
 Jewellery, 8, 226, 243, 341  
     (*See* Ornaments)  
 Jhajau, 218  
 Jhang (Attock), 37  
*Jharka*, 91  
 Jhelum district, 49  
 Jinnah, Mr (Qaid-i-Azam), 28, 36,  
     38, 118, 194, 229, 277, 303,  
     312  
 Jubbulpore, 291  
*Judges*, quoted, 194 (n)  
 Jullundur district, 138  
 Jumna, 139, 142, 174  
 Jugoslavia, 96, 263, 348  
 Jura Khurd, meeting at, 223
- Kabul river, 5  
 Kachhis, 250  
 Kaman, 205  
 Kambohs, 134  
 Kanungo, 10 (n)  
 Karnal district, 109, 156, 327 (n),  
     329 (n)  
 Kardelj, Edward, quoted, 348  
*Kasba*, 188, 201, 208-9
- Katlaur, meeting at, 112  
 Kayasth, 212 (n)  
 Keynes, Lord, 310  
 Khalistan, 137 (n)  
 Khanna, 126  
 Khan Sahib, Dr, 12, 15  
 Khatauli, 156  
 Khatri, Hindu, 75  
     Sikh, 51, 95  
 Khidwai, Mr, 151, 157  
 Khoja, 118 (n)  
 Kinglake quoted, 279  
 Kirpan, 164 (n)  
 Kitchen fireplace, 107, 154, 203  
 Knitting, 55  
 Koran, reading of, 21-2, 38, 65, 70  
*Kos*, 187 (n), 224 (n)  
 Kot Sarang, meeting at, 45  
     Sardar of, 38 ff, 55, 313, 315  
 Kulaks, 174, 211  
 Kulinjan, 158
- Laddu*, 161 (n)  
 Lady Welfare workers, 138-9  
 Lahore, 87-8  
 Lalitpur, 252  
*Lambardar*, 240 (n)  
*Langur*, 256, 283  
 Land, dividing up of, 159, 290  
     inheritance of, 102  
     nationalization, 124, 196  
     price of, 31, 80  
     reclamation, 232-3, 259  
     redemption, 333  
 Landlords, expropriation of, 48, 156  
     in C.P., 272, 284  
     in N.W.F.P., 8, 9  
     in Pb., 38, 86, 97  
     in U.P., 143, 155-6, 212  
 Lao Tzu, quoted, 299  
 Lawyers, 221, 258, 262  
 Leaders, 16, 18, 169, 312  
 Leopards, 268, 271  
 Libraries, 160, 163  
*Lingam*, 289, 331  
 Literacy, 311, 341  
 Litigation, 8, 21, 49, 67, 112, 219  
     (*See* Lawyers)

- Lorries, *see* Buses  
 Lyallpur, 83, 86  
     colony, 77 ff  
     colonists, pioneer, 81-4, 99  
  
 Machines, 50  
 Mahabharata, 282  
 Mahants, 46, 129  
 Mahasabha, 29, 227  
 Mahilpur, meeting at, 98-9  
 Mahuwa tree, 244  
 Maize, 82  
     price of, 264  
 Majha, 125 (n), 128  
 Malthone, 262  
 Malwa, 125 (n), 127  
 Mango trees in Dholpur, 218  
     in Pb., 93, 96, 111, 135  
     in U.P., 142, 147  
 Manure, 82, 173, 213  
     (*See* Fertilizers)  
 Marble Rocks, 287-8  
 Mardan, 10, 19  
 Marriage, age of, 250, 340, 345-6  
     and caste, 167-8, 330  
     and daring, 68  
     by arrangement, 73, 345  
     cost of, 8, 116, 165, 346  
     early, reason for, 346  
     (*See* Brides)  
 Massacres in Calcutta, xi  
     in Bengal, xi  
     in Bihar, xi, 62  
     in N.W.F.P., 76 (n)  
     in Pb., 45 (n), 57 (n), 105 (n),  
         181 (n), 197, 305-6  
     in U.P., 170, 185  
     (*See* Bengal, Bihar, Hazara)  
 Matches, shortage of, 14, 24, 38, 45,  
     55  
 Meals, number of, in C.P., 264, 269  
     in Gwalior, 225-6, 230  
     in Pb., 137, 333  
     in U.P., 146, 215, 247, 254  
     (*See* Diet)  
 Meat, 137, 147, 226, 230, 245  
     (*See* Diet, *Halal*, *Jhatka*)  
 Medical aid co-operatives, 96, 263  
  
 Medway, Dr, 189  
 Meerut City, 163, 170  
     district, xi  
 Meos, 181, 192-3, 196, 199  
 Metcalfe, Sir Charles, quoted, 315  
 Miani Gondal, meeting at, 67  
 Midwives, 276, 341  
     trained, 190  
     (*See* Childbirth)  
 Milk, 82, 137, 230  
     distribution of, 180  
     for school-children, 182-3  
     in Gwalior, 227  
     in U.P., 215, 218, 241, 245  
     (*See* Diet)  
 Millet, 55, 215  
     price of, 45, 241, 247, 267  
 Millstones, 25  
 Ministers, 308  
     in C.P., 286  
     in N.W.F.P., 4, 13, 24  
     in Pb., 140-1  
     knowledge of, in U.P., 146, 151,  
         156-7, 212, 217  
 Missionaries, 78, 189  
 Missionary spirit, lack of, 242, 290  
 Mohmands, 7, 8  
 Mona, meeting at, 66  
 Monarchy, 229  
     and bureaucracy, 309  
 Money, misuse of, 190  
     abundance of, 258  
 Money-lender in Bharatpur, 200-1,  
     203  
     in C.P., 262  
     in N.W.F.P., 17  
     in Pb., 69, 86, 196, 201  
     in U.P., 174, 211  
     legislation against, 45  
     Pathan, 10, 136  
     (*See* Interest rates)  
 Monkeys, 332  
     in C.P., 283  
     in Pb., 184, 187, 192  
     in U.P., 142, 145, 168, 173, 256  
 Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, 28 (n)  
     114-15  
 Morley-Minto Reforms, 114



- Mothers, attitude towards, 153, 161, 173, 344
- Mothers-in-law, 153, 189, 221, 344
- Mukerian, 92-3
- Mullahs, 37, 86
- Mullana, 136, 323
- Murder and High Court, 154  
     in C.P., 276  
     in N.W.F.P., 22, 27  
     in Pb., 34, 49, 54, 186  
     in U.P., 154  
     (See Poison)
- Mureed, 51
- Muslim League, xi, 124  
     in N.W.F.P., xii, 13, 18-19  
     in Pb., xii, 35, 38, 181, 194, 304-5, 312  
     in States, 130  
     in U.P., 155  
     (See Pakistan)
- Muslims and British Government, 18, 52, 70  
     and Hindus, xi, 29  
     and religion, 21, 103, 136, 173, 192  
     and Sikhs, 45, 51, 67, 76, 100  
     of Hindu origin, 77, 109, 116, 134, 143, 229  
     (See Hindu)
- Muthura, 149
- Nabha State, 126 (n)  
     conditions in, 127-30  
     town, 130
- Namaste*, 103 (n)
- Narbada, 262, 283, 287
- Narwar, 103 (n)
- Nathe, 41
- Nationalization, *see* Land
- Nehru, Pundit Jowahar Lal, xi, 6, 28, 162, 174-5, 257, 306  
     and peasant, 348  
     and tribesmen, xii, 18-19  
     as leader, 16, 159, 290  
     knowledge of, 151, 212, 217, 312  
     quoted, 305
- Nehru, Pundit Motilal, 115
- Newspapers, 29, 31, 54, 113, 117, 148, 162-3, 290, 346
- Noel, Lt.-Col. E. W. C., 8
- Nohta, meeting at, 275
- Noon, Malik Firoz Khan, 194
- N.F.W.P., political situation in, xii
- Officers, retired military, 18, 50, 196
- Officials, 316  
     and party, 140, 198  
     authority of, 24, 66, 141, 198  
     (See Deputy Commissioner)  
     pay of, 20, 32, 162, 225, 249, 256, 283, 317
- Oil, price of, 258  
     shortage of, in C.P., 281  
     in Pb., 38, 132, 184
- Opium, 186
- Oranges, 82, 110, 120, 170, 215, 245
- Orchards, 7, 58, 65, 110-11, 189, 218, 277
- Ornaments in C.P., 269  
     in Gwalior, 226  
     in Pb., 60  
     in U.P., 148, 194, 243, 250-1, 255, 342 (n)  
     (See Jewellery)
- Outlaws, 5, 22, 37
- Paintings, mural, 107, 164, 256, 281
- Pakistan, xi, 88, 182, 302  
     and Hindus, 100-1, 229  
     and Sikhs, xii, 51, 114  
     attitude towards, in C.P., 281  
     in N.W.F.P., 18, 28-9, 31  
     in Pb., 84-5, 100-1, 137, 182
- Palestine, 43
- Palwal, 188-9
- Panchayats, 296, 314-15  
     for women, 164  
     in Gwalior, 224  
     in Pb., 104, 112, 135, 191, 300  
     in U.P., 163, 315  
     indigenous, 191, 258, 314  
     need for, 273
- Pansoria, 268
- Panth, Pundit Govind Vallabh, 151, 217
- Panuhana, meeting at, 192
- Paosar, 191

- Paraunta*, 61 (n)  
*Parvasti*, need for, 219-20, 265  
 Patel, Mr, quoted, 320  
 Pathans, 4, 7, 10-12, 21, 136, 230, 277  
 Patiala State, 30, 130 (n)  
     conditions in, 132-4  
 Patsal, meeting at, 210  
 Patwaris, strike of, 20  
 Pay, *see* Officials  
 Peacocks, 103, 187, 191, 207, 256  
 Peasant, 349  
     and change, 347  
     and education, 221, 338, 348  
     and Government, 310  
     and Government service, 164  
     and natural beauty, 76, 126, 263-4  
     and politicians, 124, 190, 312  
     and politics, 201, 302-3  
     and truth, 135, 192, 258, 325  
     in India and Java compared, 236-7  
 Peasant's friendliness, 216  
     generosity, 124, 266  
     hospitality in Bharatpur, 203  
         in N.W.F.P., 14, 25, 31  
         in Pb., 169  
         in U.P., 145, 162, 169  
     inertia, 338, 347-8  
     submissiveness, 130, 133, 258, 294, 323, 325  
         (*See* Change)  
 Persian wheel, 11, 45, 74-5, 112, 245-6  
 Pigs, 207, 227, 262  
*Pilau*, 109 (n)  
 Pilgrimages, 223-4, 239, 260  
 Pilgrims, 149, 169  
 Pind Dadan Khan, 63  
 Pindi Bhattian, 76-7  
 Pipal tree, 130, 162, 187, 282  
 Pipe smoking, 273  
 Pirs, 27, 85-6, 185, 329  
 Plague, 137-8, 271, 275  
 Plato quoted, 129, 321  
 Po Chui, quoted, 156  
 Poison, 95, 186-7  
 Police in Bharatpur, 204  
     in Pb., 128, 195, 316  
     in Sikh States, 128, 133, 186  
 Polygamy, 9  
 Population, pressure of, 63, 84, 102, 138  
     (*See* Birth control, Houses, Poverty)  
 Potatoes, 82, 193  
 Potter, 75, 286  
 Poultry, 333-4  
     in C.P., 280  
     in Gwalior, 227  
     in Pb., 38, 193  
     in U.P., 217, 241  
         (*See* Eggs)  
 Poverty, 241, 246, 248, 250  
     and happiness, 232  
     and population, 17, 339  
 Powadh Sikh, 127  
 Prayer, call to, 270  
 Press, 229  
 Prices, black market, in Pb., 36, 45, 56-7, 184  
     in U.P., 241, 247, 253  
     controlled, 36, 45, 56, 241, 247, 253  
     effect of high, 333  
         in Bharatpur, 209  
         in Gwalior, 225  
         in Pb., 66, 71-2  
         in U.P., 169, 243, 248  
     rise in, 20, 147, 225, 333  
         (*See* Appendix, *Bajra*, Carts, Cattle, Cloth, Dhoti, Eggs, Ghi, Gram, Maize, Millet, Rape, Rice, Sugar, Wheat)  
 Priests, 323  
     (*See* Brahmins, Granthi)  
 Produce, requisition of, 280  
 Propaganda, 23, 86, 111, 133, 169, 302-3, 308, 312  
 Prosperity without education, 67, 339  
 Punjab and Hindus, 231, 245  
     communities in, xii (n)  
     Government, action by, xi  
     languages of, 90  
     partition of, 305-7, 337  
     political situation in, xii, 304-6  
     rivers, 63 (n)  
     taxation in, 310 (n)

- Punjabi, character of, 57  
 ubiquity of, 228, 286-7
- Purdah, 220, 343-4  
 in Gwalior, 226  
 in N.W.F.P., 11, 22  
 in Pb., 59, 60, 73-4, 100, 106, 182  
 in U.P., 144, 158, 160-1, 166, 173,  
 342-3  
 (See Women)
- Quail-fighting, 8
- Qutab, 179
- Radio, 44, 51
- Rajpura, 163
- Rajputs, 104, 119  
 and purdah, 100, 158  
 and servants, 106  
 Muslim, 76, 115-16, 134  
 Thakur, 216  
 (See Smoking)
- Ramayana, 168, 188, 218, 275, 282
- Rameshwaram, 224, 260
- Ram-fighting, 8
- Ramgarh, meeting at, 332
- Ramna, 268
- Rampur, land bought in, 81
- Ram Ram*, 217, 249, 276
- Ramzan fast, 21
- Rape (plant), 136, 131, 199  
 price of, 207
- Ration cards, bogus, 321
- Rationed goods, distribution of, 251,  
 280, 319-20  
 (See Black market, Controls)
- Ravi, 89
- Religion, 325, 330-1  
 and communists, 121, 123, 126,  
 159  
 and economics, 334  
 and Hindus, 149  
 and intelligentsia, 288  
 and Muslims, 21, 103, 136, 173, 192  
 and peasant, 86, 123, 202, 220, 282,  
 296  
 and Sikhs, 103, 113  
 (See Jains, Pilgrimages, Sadhus,  
 Temples)
- Representation by nomination, 257-8
- Republic, *see* India
- Respect, terms of, 202
- Rest-houses in C.P., 264, 266, 268,  
 278  
 in N.W.F.P., 5, 11  
 in Pb., 43, 63, 139, 258-9  
 in U.P., 143, 218, 244, 252-3
- Revolution, 230
- Rewa, Maharaja of, 230
- Rice, 267
- Ride, distance covered by, 83, 175,  
 268, 292  
 preparations for, xiii, 5, 6
- Risley, Sir Herbert, quoted, 326, 329,  
 349
- Roads in C.P., 264  
 in Pb., 54, 131, 133-4  
 in States, 131, 207, 235-6, 239  
 in U.P., 145, 165, 167, 170, 246,  
 260  
 traffic on, 3, 142, 204, 206, 218  
 (See Tracks)
- Rupar, 108
- Russia, 29, 30, 47, 159, 230, 232
- Rust in C.P., 264-5, 267, 276, 285-6  
 in U.P., 253-4, 259
- Sadhus, 104, 208-9, 242-3, 270-1,  
 282, 288  
 bogus, 242-3, 275, 289
- Saharanpur, 142
- Salaries, *see* Officials
- Salarwala, meeting at, 79
- Salt Range, 46, 53, 61  
 cultivation in, 58, 63  
 tax, 62
- Salts and irrigation, 66
- Samskar*, 220
- Sangla, 78
- Sankh river, 226
- Sanitation, *see* Health
- Sanori, 244
- Saonrs, 268 ff, 280
- Sarak Dudhli, 143
- Saree, 274
- Saugor, 267
- School *versus* temple, 103, 164, 282

- Schoolmasters, 164, 256, 283, 323  
 Schools, 311  
     and food, 182  
     for boys in C.P., 276  
         in N.W.F.P., 30-1  
         in Pb., 38, 65, 67, 101, 113  
         (See Hoshiarpur, Lyallpur colony)  
         in States, 203, 224, 235, 322  
         in U.P., 143, 163, 172, 214, 260  
     for girls, 99, 103, 113, 164, 172, 341  
         (See Co-education)  
     private, 69-70, 103, 214, 217  
 Seed, selected, 8, 43, 260, 276, 280  
 Self-respect, increase in, 59, 90, 220, 294  
     taxation, 103, 119, 135, 163, 282  
 Servants, 90, 106, 274  
     attitude towards, 265  
         (See Village servants)  
 Shahadra, meeting at, 214  
*Shariat*, 22, 28  
 Sheep's milk, 23  
 Shewa, meeting at, 14 ff  
 Shisham tree, 246  
 Shopkeepers, 104, 251, 320  
 Shoes, 72, 195, 206, 219, 247-8, 250  
     removal of, 154  
 Shrines, 31, 208, 242  
 Sikandar Lodi, 236  
 Sikh, character of, 307  
     leaders, 95, 98  
     peasant, 67, 78, 89, 113, 124, 186-7  
     rule, 45  
     States, 30, 186  
         (See Nabha, Patiala)  
     villages, 100, 112, 135  
 Sikhs, xii, 95, 125  
     aims of, 302  
     and communists, 121  
     and Hindus, 45, 197  
         (See Hindu ties)  
     and Muslims, 51, 65, 76, 90, 115, 197  
     and religion, 103, 113  
         (See Akali, Majha, Malwa, Powadh)  
 Simon, Sir John (Lord), 170  
 Sind, land bought in, 80-1  
 Singapore, fall of, 96  
 Siran river, 31  
 Sirsa Sub-Division, 186-7  
 Sleeman, Lt.-Col. W. H., 223, 227, 232, 239, 253  
 Smoking, 89, 119, 148, 191  
     (See Biri)  
 Socialists, 159, 290  
 Sohan river, 43  
 Soldiers, 43, 49, 228, 260, 264  
     and bonus, 23, 27, 120  
 Soil, colour of, 243, 268, 283  
 Spells, *see* Charms  
 Spinning, 60, 258, 294  
 Spirits, evil, 271  
 Squirrels, 256  
 Stabbings, xi, 170, 229  
 Stampe, Sir W., 162, 165, 342  
 Standard of living, rise in, in Pb., 82, 90, 120, 138, 336  
     in U.P., 225, 243, 255  
 States, Indian, 321 ff  
     (See Bharatpur, Datia, Dholpur, Faridkot, Gwalior, Nabha, Patiala, Swat)  
 Strikes, 20, 256, 283  
 Sugar factory, 232-3  
     quota in C.P., 280, 319  
         in Gwalior, 234  
         in Pb., 57, 319  
         in U.P., 243  
     shortage of, in Bharatpur, 202, 204  
         in C.P., 281  
         in Pb., 38, 45, 55, 184  
         in U.P., 248  
         (See Black market, Prices)  
 Sugar-cane in Gwalior, 233, 235  
     in N.W.F.P., 7  
     in Pb., 102, 192-3  
     in U.P., 146  
 Sulphate of ammonia, 276, 279  
 Superstition, 73, 220, 331  
 Supplies Department, 56, 195, 197  
     for touring officers, 154-5, 279  
 Suttee, 182, 289

- Swabi, 23  
 Swaran Singh, Sardar, 95  
 Swastika, 188  
 Swat, 10, 11, 16, 19, 22, 27  
 Sweepers, 104, 107, 157, 184, 235,  
     278, 285  
     (See Untouchability)
- Taj, 213  
 Taja Bara, meeting at, 38  
 Talagang tehsil, 45, 50, 319-20  
 Talbahat, 246  
 Tanners, 104, 135, 157, 184, 226-7,  
     285, 327 (n)  
 Tara Singh, Master, 95, 98  
 Tarbela, meeting at, 28  
 Tarnab fruit farm, 8  
 Taxation and freedom, 17, 30, 152,  
     183  
     in Bharatpur, 202, 209  
 Tea-drinking, 334  
     in N.W.F.P., 12, 23, 119  
     in Pb., 53, 61, 137, 334 (n)  
 Tea-sets, 61, 342  
 Teeth, adornment of, 211  
 Tehsildar, 6 (n), 141  
 Temple entry, 227, 234, 251, 257,  
     328 (n)  
     worship, 103, 129, 173, 188, 223  
 Temples in C.P., 270, 274-5, 282  
     in Datia, 238  
     in Gwalior, 223  
     in Pb., 104, 107  
     (See School)
- Tenants in C.P., 284  
     in N.W.F.P., 9  
     in Pb., 38, 42, 97, 124  
     in U.P., 143, 212
- Thapla, meeting at, 31  
 Thetki Qabadpur, meeting at, 147  
 Threshing machine, 285  
 Thrift, *see* Village banks  
 Tiger, 231  
 Titles renounced, 196  
 Tiwana, Sir Khizar Hayat, 304  
 Tobacco, 17  
     (See Smoking)
- Tope, 25
- Torrent beds (chos), 111  
 Touring, 110, 154, 279, 309  
     (See Horses)
- Town *versus* village, 97-8  
 Towns, squalor of, 96, 134, 136, 139  
 Tracker, 97  
 Tracks, 285  
 Tractor, 232  
 Transmigration, 220  
 Traffic, *see* Roads  
 Trees, 134, 142, 244, 246  
     (See Bamboo, Banyan, Pipal,  
     *Tribaini*)
- Trelawny, 52  
*Tribaini*, 130, 135  
 Tube wells, 75, 162, 165  
 Tulsi, 260
- Udasis, 129 (n)  
 Unionist Government, 304, 320  
     Party, 52, 62, 67, 85, 103  
 U.P., disturbances in, xi, 169-70  
     modern facilities in, 310-11  
     co-operative thrift and credit in,  
     249
- Untouchability, 327-8  
     in C.P., 285  
     in Gwalior, 223, 227, 234  
     in Nabha, 127  
     in Pb., 106-7, 135, 184  
     in U.P., 146-7, 165, 169, 173, 257  
     (See Gandhi, Temple entry)
- Urdu, 90  
 Uttalan, meeting in, 121
- Vaccination, 138  
 Vedic medicine, 129, 217, 278  
 Vegetables in C.P., 280  
     in Pb., 67, 82, 189, 193, 333-4  
     in U.P., 146-7, 189, 215, 241, 245,  
     249
- Veils, 343-4  
 Vendettas, 10, 22  
 Ventilation, *see* Windows  
 Veterinary dispensaries, *see* Dispen-  
     saries
- Victoria, Queen, 71, 186, 217  
     proclamation of, 310

- Village banks in C.P., 284  
     in Datia, 238  
     in Gwalior, 224  
     in N.W.F.P., 28, 31  
     in Pb., 112, 119  
     in U.P., 210, 249  
     cleanliness, 46, 189  
     college, 99  
     drama, 279  
     feuds, 68-9, 276  
     life, 97-8, 129  
     meetings and truth, 240-1, 247, 254  
     morals, 54  
     needs in C.P., 280  
         in Gwalior, 231  
         in Pb., 50, 54, 138, 190, 192, 315  
         in U.P., 156, 169, 172-3, 214  
     politics, 299  
         in Pb., 67, 69, 100, 109, 118  
         in U.P., 146, 158, 166  
     sacrificed for town, 319  
     self-help, 103, 119, 135, 163  
     servants, 71-2, 106, 135, 257, 326  
         number of, 314  
     social structure, 104, 157, 257, 326  
 Villages, condition of, 335  
     in C.P., 273, 278, 281, 285, 291  
     in Pb., 46, 189, 192-3  
     in U.P., 142, 161-2, 174, 241  
     paving of, 103, 119, 163  
 Vindhya, 256, 262, 278, 283-4  
 Vultures, 256
- Wages, 350  
     in C.P., 264, 269, 274  
     in U.P., 249
- Wah, 34
- Waley, Arthur, quoted, 156-7
- Walking, 53, 223-4
- War, knowledge of the, 255, 283  
     service in the, 40, 43, 228
- Waste, *see* Extravagance
- Water, influence of, 45, 232, 342
- Waterlogging, 66, 77-8, 80
- Weavers, 42
- Webb, Sidney, quoted, 314
- Wells, 43, 112, 205, 218, 238, 272  
     drinking, 107, 138  
     shared, 241  
     with leather skins (*charsa*), 206, 246  
     (*See* Persian wheel)
- Welfare work, 139
- Wheat, *see* Rust  
     price of, in Bharatpur, 209  
     in C.P., 267, 284  
     in Pb., 36, 56, 120  
     in U.P., 253, 258
- Widow, 164  
     remarriage, 116, 288
- Wife-beating, 9, 21, 74
- Wint, Guy, quoted, 312
- Windows, 11, 138
- Wireless, 51, 346
- Wives, attitude towards, 25, 153, 160-1, 189, 344  
     attitude of, 345
- Women and change, 21, 74, 90, 341-2  
     (*See* Wife-beating)  
     and childbirth, 138, 190  
     and dress, 41, 146, 148, 341  
     (*See* Burqa, Ghaggra, Saree)  
     and education, 181  
     (*See* Schools)  
     and freedom, 153, 159-60  
     and politics, 86, 189  
     and stage, 21  
     emancipation of, 220  
     out of purdah, 4, 146, 269  
     (*See* Daughters, Mothers, Wives)
- Yang Hsiung, quoted, 157
- Yarn, 42
- Young, Arthur, xi, 26, 52, 204  
     Sir Popham, 81 (n)
- Yunani medicine, 48  
     medical college, 65, 93
- Zaildar, 35 (n)
- Zakat, 17

