and the bodyguards and the obsequies of princes—it was all a kind of charade. The Viceroy was only a temporary Civil Servant, on a five-year term, and would presently go home again. The rules of British India were inescapable, and exact. When a Viceroy sailed out to assume his dignities he was entitled to a grant of £3,500, to cover his travel expenses and equipment. When he returned to England at the end of his service he was allowed a ship of the Indian Marine as far as Suez, the limit of his power: but once there, he and his Vicereine were all on their own, could claim no more divine appurtenances, and must seek the help of Thomas Cook's for their onward travel, paying their own fares.

Morris Pax Britannica

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Consolations

Oh, I've seen a lot of girls, my boys, and drunk a lot of beer,
And I've met with some of both, my boys, as left me mighty queer,
But for beer to knock you sideways and girls to make you sigh,
You must camp at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

We camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai,
The road to Gundagai! Five miles from Gundagai!
Yes, we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

Australian Bush Song

15

THE New Imperialism was born out of a medley of moods and circumstances, not all of them happy, some of them distasteful. It emerged a boisterous credo, full of swank, colour and sweep. On the face of it the British seemed to be having a marvellous time, bathing in the glory of it all, swathed in bunting and lit up with fireworks. The late Victorians were not half so strait-laced as their reputation was presently to imply. Their young men were full of dash and energy; they revelled in the stimulations of the outdoor life; the pleasures of Empire lay not only in national pride, duty performed and dividends paid, but also in the particular consolations a people could devise for itself, when placed in a position of absolute command in an alien land and climate.

2

Sport was the first. The British took their games with them wherever they went. Sport was their chief spiritual export, and was to prove among their more resilient memorials. They took cricket to Samoa and the Ionian Islands, and both the Samoans and the Ionians took it up with enthusiasm. They went climbing in the Canadian Rockies, and by 1897 the Canadians had their own Alpine Club. They introduced football to the aborigines of Australia, and wherever in the world the ground was flat enough they seem to have built a tennis court. The highest golf course in the world was made by the British at Gulmarg, in the Himalaya, 8,700 feet high: the highest cricket pitch was near by, at Chail. In Salisbury, Rhodesia, the pioneers were already playing cricket matches between the Public Schools Boys and the rest, and a chief qualification for a job on the administration was said to be a good batting average. The first American golf course was laid at New York in 1888, but the

British had been playing the game at Calcutta since 1829. Boxing was compulsory in the British Army. 'Open order, march!' the order ran. 'Front rank, about turn! *Box*!'

Above all the British took with them everywhere their taste for equestrian sports, inherited as it was among their friends the Indian princes from the warlike tendencies of their forebears. In those days the horse and the gentry still went together, racing and hunting were the passions of the English upper classes, and horsiness was more than a social phenomenon; it was an historical legacy, too. The thoroughbred horse went with them always, and there was scarcely a town in the Empire which did not have its race-course—a scrubby little ring of beaten-out turf on the veldt, or splendid arenas like Calcutta's or the Curragh in Ireland, with their glittering grandstands, brilliant white rails, club-houses and sprinkled lawns. They used to have race dances at Calcutta, with public breakfasts, and curious alternations of sweepstake and country dance, and at Madras the sportsmen of the East India Company had built themselves a delightful set of assembly rooms beside the track, a tall big-windowed building with fine wide terraces and flagstaffs, and emanations of punch and nosegay. As early as 1891 Lord Randolph Churchill was complaining that his horse had been nobbled at a race meeting at Salisbury, Rhodesia, a charge that rings all too true: and when Queen Victoria sent four envoys from the Royal Horse Guards to visit Lobengula in his kraal, almost the first thing they did was to arrange a race meeting, including the Zambesi Handicap and the Bulawayo Plate.

The race-course at Simla was on the high plateau of Annandale, surrounded by tall pines and deodars, and deliciously secluded. The race-course at Colombo was in the middle of the city, like a bullring in Spain.[1] The race-course at Hong Kong was in Happy Valley, separated from the Chinese cemetery only by a fence of bamboos. The Poona race-course was inside the General Parade Ground. The Badulla race-course ran all the way round a little lake. An artillery range straddled the Lucknow race-course. The Darjeeling race-course was said to be the smallest in the world, and the Calcutta race-course was claimed to be the largest. In many parts of the

[1] It is now an open air lecture-hall of the University of Ceylon.

Empire the climax of the social season was a big *race meeting*. From every part of Australia the graziers made their way to Melbourne in October, to ensconce themselves and their families in the comfortable old-school hostelries of the city, and show themselves off at the Melbourne Cup: often the whole year was remembered by what happened that day, and Australians would refer to the past as 'the year Newhaven won the Cup', or 'the year Wait-a-Bit lost by a head'.[1] The great day of the Calcutta year was the day of the Viceroy's Cup race, for a cup given annually by the reigning Viceroy. 'The grandstand is filled', wrote G. W. Forrest in the nineties, 'with noble dames from England, from America and all parts of the world, who have come with their spouses to visit the British Empire. In the paddock is a noble duke, a few lords, one or two millionaires from America, and some serious politicians, who have visited this land to study the Opium Question, and feel ashamed of being seen at a race-course. The air resounds with the cries of the bookmaker, and an eager crowd surges around the totalizer—for on the Viceroy's Cup day even the most cautious bank manager feels bound to have one bet.' After the church and perhaps the law court, the race-course was the principal landmark of a British imperial city—as prominent as the amphitheatre of Rome, and with much the same meaning.

When they were not racing the British were likely to be hunting, for wherever they went they scratched together a pack of hounds, reinforced it with the odd terrier, and set off in pursuit of fox, jackal, elk, pig, hare, red deer, hyena, or whatever else was available to be chased. (Everybody in the Empire seemed to possess a fox-terrier, a bullterrier or a spaniel: no group photograph is complete without a dog in somebody's arms, and in India many imperial households had their own dog-boy, generally the son of a more senior employee.) There were scores of light-hearted hunts in India, and in Africa, so strong was the ethos of the British, even a few Boers took up the sport, and were to be seen authentically costumed in pinks, shouting Tally-ho in Afrikaans. The Montreal Hunt, founded

[1] The Cup is still the great event of the Australian season, and the Windsor Hotel in Melbourne, one of the graziers' favourites, seems to me on the whole the most comfortable I know.

by British officers in 1826, flourished in the heart of French Canada.[1] The Calpe Hunt started with a pair of foxhounds actually on the Rock of Gibraltar, where foxes lived high in the brush among the apes: by the nineties it was one of the smartest imperial hunts, was regularly entertained by Spanish grandees on their estates across the frontier, and once went over to Tangier, 'where a wolf gave an excellent run of over 40 minutes and a distance of nine miles'.

In India pigsticking, like polo, was pursued with passion, encouraged by immense silver trophies presented by Maharajahs. The Kadir Cup for pigsticking was one of the principal sporting trophies of India (it was won in 1897 by Mr Gillman, Royal Horse Artillery, on Huntsman). This tremendously exciting sport, in which a single man on horseback with a spear was pitted against boars, tigers, buffalo, or even rhinoceri, had been popular among the British since the early days of the East India Company: by the nineties the north-west provinces of India were its headquarters, and on the great day of the Kadir Cup sometimes a hundred spears competed, and the men and their horses settled in gay tented camps upon the Punjab plains, practising their runs with stampeding hoofs and dust-clouds in sunshine, like knights before jousting.

Whatever there was to chase or kill, the British pursued. In those days the reaches of the Empire teemed with multitudes of game, the deer and the zebra roamed Africa in their countless thousands, and conservation was not yet a preoccupation of nature-lovers. Hawkers called 'hare-wallahs' used to frequent the Indian cantonments, selling live hares and wild cats to be chased by the soldiers' whippets, or jackals to be pitted against two or three dogs in a ball-alley. If there was nothing to fish, the imperialists stocked their rivers with trout and salmon from home, so that some of the highland hotels of New Zealand, for example, faithfully reproduced all the tangy pleasures of Scottish fishing inns, with knowledgeable ghillies in attendance, fishing books lovingly kept up, malt whisky before big log fires at the end of the day. No colonial handbook was complete without its

[1] It was only in the 1950s that French-Canadians were welcomed in any numbers to this very exclusive hunt: until then, I was once told in Montreal, the country was only hunted by 'English Montrealers of a certain type'.

chapter on the blood sports, though when Sir George Scott compiled his admirable Burmese guide he was obliged to observe that the Burmese did very little hunting themselves owing to the 'mingled pity and dislike' with which hunters were regarded by Buddhists.

3

Drink came next—food did not interest them half so much. 'Diseases Affecting the Whole Empire', was a heading in Volume VI of the *Oxford Survey of the British Empire*, and the very first ailment to be discussed was Alcoholism. It is easy to see why. All classes of the British abroad, Governors to troopers, seem to have drunk terrifically—sometimes to alleviate a grim climate, sometimes because they were lonely, and often because it was part of the general effervescence of life. In the imperial cities the breweries went up almost as fast as the race-courses, and many brewers in England produced beers especially for colonial markets—'Produced by Brewers', as was claimed for Wrexham Lager Beer, 'thoroughly conversant with the requirements of a Tropical Country'. Millers, the Colombo importers, offered a lager bottled for them in Germany, and a malt whisky especially bottled in the Highlands. The sundowner was an institution throughout the tropical Empire—that first delectable drink of the evening, brought to your veranda with glistening paraphernalia of ice-bucket, napkin, carafe, and soda-siphon, by a servant in a long white gown and a crimson cummerbund, a tarboosh or a turban: the custom began, it was said, because it was thought that the moment of sunset was particularly ill omened for malaria, and that a strong drink taken then, perhaps with a shot of quinine in it, was the best prophylactic.

It was the British from Britain who were the heaviest drinkers. None of the colonials could match them. The Australians already had a reputation as beer-drinkers, and they also produced excellent wines—Trollope thought the white wine of the Upper Yarra vineyards, at 6d a pint, the best *vin ordinaire* he had ever tasted: but their consumption of alcohol per head was hardly more than a third that of the British at home. The Indian breweries were producing rather more than 6 million gallons of beer annually: 3 million gallons of it was

drunk by the British soldiery, who called it 'neck-oil', 'purge', or 'pig's ear', and who often grouped themselves in 'boozing schools', dedicated to the common spending of all available funds on drink. The greatest single problem facing the Calcutta police in the 1890s was the spate of drunken British seamen at week-ends: in the Royal Navy more officers were court-martialled for drunkenness than for any other offence.

Among the moneyed classes, and the gamblers, champagne was the drink of the day. When West Ridgeway, later Governor of Ceylon, marched under Roberts from Kabul to Kandahar, he was haunted throughout by the thought of iced champagne. So terribly did it pursue him that when Roberts ordered him to ride as fast as he could to the nearest railway station, with an urgent dispatch for the Viceroy, the first thing that occurred to him was that at any Indian railway station iced champagne would be available. He telegraphed ahead to reserve a bottle, he rode breakneck for three days and nights—'and oh! the disappointment: the ice was melted, the champagne was corked, and the next morning I had a head'.

So important was champagne to these men of Empire. One of the many complaints of the Assistant Commissary-General, when Wolseley's army was having difficulties in the Sudan campaign of 1884, was that the champagne, officially taken for medicinal purposes, was 'of very indifferent quality, and calculated to depress rather than to exhilarate the system'. Officers' messes normally carried vast amounts of champagne around with them on campaigns —General Buller, on this same advance up the Nile, used to give seven-course dinners in his tent, washed down with any amount of it—and champagne was ordered as a matter of course for any imperial triumph or venture. 'Champagne' Anderson, a jolly old prospector of the Rhodesian nineties, got his name because after selling a claim for a satisfactory profit he ordered himself a hotel bath of champagne, at 25s a bottle. Lord Avonmore set off for the Klondike with seventy-five cases of champagne: unfortunately it froze, and was auctioned off in the main street of Edmonton—it went for 25 cents a case, successful bidders instantly breaking the necks of the good bottles, and drinking them there and then.

It is not surprising that the temperance workers were active in these hard-drinking years of the imperial heyday. The Army had its own Temperance Association, whose canteens in every overseas station sold only soft drinks, cakes and bread and butter; members were given a medal after each six months of teetotalism, and official positions on the association were much coveted, allegedly because good money could be made on the side, to spend on whiskey. One of the most eminent reformers was Thomas Cook, the travel king, who began life running a temperance hotel, and whose first conducted tours were temperance outings. Cook never demanded total abstinence of his clients, as did his rivals, Frames Tours, but he never hid his distaste for strong liquor, however happily the British officers, feet up on the rail, swigged their whisky on his Nile steamers. He was an active teetotaller all his life, and once recorded with satisfaction that there were 5,908 recorded abstainers in the Indian Army. The dangers of contaminating native peoples with alcohol were always alive in the evangelist mind—and with reason, for the Australian aborigines, the Canadian Indians, the Maoris and the Polynesians had all been half-rotted by liquor, when first introduced to it by the British. Sometimes a native ruler saw the point, and proved in his conversion more abstemious than his converters. Khama, the great king of Bechuanaland, not only compelled his entire tribe to turn Christian, but in the 1880s decreed prohibition throughout his domains. In a country several times the size of England the only place where a drink could be sold to anyone, African or European, was the railway refreshment room—that ultimate haven of Empire. Khama called alcohol 'the enemy of the world', and wished it could all be spilt into the sea: but he was out of his time, for there has probably been no more effective agency for distributing this particular consolation throughout the world, than the thirsty Empire of the British.

4

They liked their creature comforts, and were able to indulge them more luxuriously than they generally could at home, especially in the tropical possessions. With their coveys of servants and their

social privileges, they could live in a class above themselves, elaborated in grandeur as they rose in rank, until at last in their retirement back they went to England, to live in obscurity with a housekeeper and a jobbing gardener, and be known to the neighbours, after ruling a couple of million people for half a lifetime, as having been 'something in the colonies'. In the early days of Empire they had adopted the sybaritic ways of the natives, dressed themselves in silks and reclined languidly on divans with hookahs: as late as 1859 Samuel Shepheard, founder of Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo, was portrayed dressed altogether as an Egyptian, feet up on a wide and squashy sofa, with a shallow tarboosh on his head, a parrot at his elbow, and a splendid brass hubble-bubble conveniently at hand. By the nineties the British usually preferred their own varieties of relaxation, and wherever they went they took with them the chintz, the leather arm-chairs, the glass decanters and the potted plants that were the hall-marks of cultivated leisure at home.

The club was pre-eminently a product of this portable décor, barring only the chintz. Insulated against the world outside, barred almost certainly to natives and very likely to females, with its own hierarchy of president, committee and senior members, the club was a comforting enclave of Englishness, its familiar features unchanged whether it was deposited in equatorial heat or near-Arctic cold. It was social centre, library, hotel, town forum, recreation ground all in one. If ever the British community wished to forgather, it would do so 'up at the Club': and whenever the wandering Briton wished to find company of his own kind he had only to get himself introduced to a member, and soon he would be standing at the bar as if he owned it, asking his neighbour if he happened to know 'Tommy' Oldbourne, who'd been Forest Officer in those parts in the eighties. Some clubs were exceedingly luxurious. The Kimberley Club, in the heyday of Rhodes and his diamond cronies, was as lavish as you might expect: it was a graceful low white building, arcades below, veranda above, with wrought-iron railings, imposing lamp standards, a pair of tall flagpoles and a small projecting balcony, like those on the Doge's Palace, from which overwhelmingly successful financiers might harangue or encourage the toiling speculators below. It reeked of success, lived by diamonds, and was

frequented by all the flashiest millionaires of the day—Rhodes himself, lounging in his wicker chair on the terrace, the indefatigable Alfred Beit, who dined there every evening, returning to his office after dinner to continue making money till midnight, or Barney Barnato, the ex-boxer from London, who drowned himself by jumping from a ship in Cape Town harbour on Jubilee day.

The club at Madras was described, in *Ivey's Club Directory*, as 'one of the most magnificent clubs in the world, amidst the splendours of tropical vegetation and surrounded by luxuries which Nature and Art combine to offer those who can enjoy spacious apartments, cool colonnades, the grateful sea-breezes wafted across green fields laden with the perfume of roses and mendhim, while ice, fruit and flowers —to say nothing of admirably trained servants—contribute to the snatches of Sybarite enjoyment in which even a soldier may at times be allowed to indulge'. It was in the club at the hill station of Ootacamund in southern India—'Snooty Ooty'—that a subaltern called Neville Chamberlain, in 1875, first thought of adding an extra coloured ball to the billiards table, and thus invented the game of snooker: it was named after the term given in the British Army to a first-year officer cadet, and the original rules were hung on a wall in the Ootacamund Club, at the start of their phenomenal journey around the world.

In Australia the clubs very early became strongholds of established wealth and dignity in a disrespectful continent. The grandest of them was the Melbourne Club, which had begun indeed as a rip-roaring affair, whose members went in for false fire-alarms, pushing policemen into mud-holes, stealing door knockers or fighting not very deadly duels—they had a special annexe to creep into, to sleep it off or lie low. It had matured into a very bastion of respectability, with handsome renaissance premises in Collins Street, liveried menials and large lace-curtained windows through which the eminent bankers, politicians, graziers and mining men of Victoria could look out upon the life of their metropolis, and deplore the passing of the old days. The Rideau Club in Ottawa had elegant premises directly opposite the Parliament Buildings of the Canadian Confederacy, with balconies allowing members a canopied grandstand view of every ceremonial. The Kildare Street Club in Dublin

was the stronghold of the Anglo-Irish, a fortress of British ascendancy almost as formidable as Dublin Castle itself, and designed by the architect Benjamin Woodward in his most overpowering Venetian Gothic.

Let us visit, for a taste of imperial club life at its most agreeable, the Hill Club at Nuwara Eliya in Ceylon. This little town lay high among the tea estates of the interior, in country which had known the young Samuel Baker among its first British settlers, and the baby Jack Fisher among its residents. It was the principal hill station of Ceylon, and a perfect period piece of the Victorian Empire. Set on a grassy plateau among the hills, immediately below the highest mountain on the island, it was like a model hill station in an exhibition. The British had laid out a park, with a maze and a botanical garden. They had dammed a little lake. They had marked out gentle walks around the surrounding woods, and named them for great ladies of the colony—Lady Horton's Walk, or Lady McCallum's Drive. Fir trees flourished, and gave the place a Highland look. There was a big half-timbered Grand Hotel, and a gabled cottage for the Governor of Ceylon, with a pond and a croquet lawn of exquisitely mown buffalo grass. There were the inevitable golf and race-courses, and villas strung about the lake like fishing lodges round a loch; and an English church, of course, and a lending library; and poised most benignly above the plateau, the Hill Club.

It was a low, baronial sort of building with gardens all around it. Its windows were mullioned, and inside it the atmosphere of an English or more properly a Scottish country house was diligently re-created. If the private houses of the British Empire tended towards the suburban, the clubs smacked distinctly of landed gentry. *Blackwood's*, *The Field*, the *Illustrated London News* lay on the smoking-room table, and *The Times* and the *Morning Post*, not more than a month old, were carefully smoothed in the breakfast room. Glass-enclosed upon the walls were the champion trout of the local hill streams, descendants of those first brought to Ceylon by the British fifty years before. There were rod racks about, landing-nets, somebody's waders in the back passage, and when a rattle of wheels was heard outside out ran a couple of turbaned servants to help another

sportsman from his tonga, collect his bags and his rod case, his walnut fly box and his boots, and usher him inside for his bath and his sundowner. Service at this club was paternal, or perhaps avuncular. The planting families used it as a second home, and the club servants were like family retainers to them all. The Hill Club had a useful little library, mostly books about Ceylon, but it was chiefly a place for outdoor men. The grave seniors of the Indian Civil Service might not feel at home here: this was the Pax Britannica at its most boyish and breezy, where the bedroom fires flickered in the mountain evenings like nursery memories, and a chap slept like a log.[1]

5

Throughout the length and breadth of the Empire a well-spoken, reasonably well-connected young man, with a few introductions in the right places, and a sufficiently entertaining line in small talk, could travel by himself without feeling the need for an hotel. If he did not stay at clubs, somebody was sure to invite him to stay at a bungalow. Family travellers, though, must depend upon hotels or the official rest-houses which the British erected in most of their Eastern possessions. Then as now the good traveller did not greatly care. Henry Beveridge,[2] a retired Indian Civil Servant on a sentimental revisit to India in the 1890s, happily put up at the Temperance Hotel in Mango Lane, Bombay, where the daily all-in charge was 3s 4d, and the monthly tariff £4. Others were less easily satisfied. G. W. Steevens thought there were only four hotels in India that could 'indulgently be called second-class', while all the rest were 'unredeemably vile'. The only country inns in Rhodesia were thatched huts of clay attached to the trading stores, and Kipling paints a compassionate portrait of a British commercial

[1] Nuwara Eliya (pronounced more or less *Noorellya*) has miraculously defied the years. The little town is almost unchanged, the Governor's cottage is impeccably kept up for the Prime Minister of Ceylon, and in 1965 the Hill Club still had not admitted a single Ceylonese to membership.

[2] Father of Lord Beveridge and so grandfather of the Welfare State. He joined the East India Company in 1836 and died in 1929, the year the British Labour Government declared Dominion status to be its goal for India.

traveller stuck forlornly in an hotel—'dark and bungaloathsome'—in one of the sleazier corners of Empire. 'Isn't this a sweet place? There ain't no ticca-gharries, and there ain't nothing to eat, if you haven't brought your victuals, and they charge you three-eight a for bottle of whisky. Oh! it's a sweet place!'

It was only along the great trade routes that the Empire sponsored its own luxury hotels, whose names had entered the vocabulary of travel. Of them all the most famous was Shepheard's in Cairo. Its new building had been finished in 1890, and it stood in Italianate glory, looking across the Ezbekia Gardens to the Opera House, with Cook's almost next door. Its original fortunes had been built on the Overland Route to India, before the cutting of the Suez Canal. Now it prospered largely because of the Cairo winter season, which brought hundreds of rich Europeans and Americans to Egypt each year. Shepheard's wide terrace was the most celebrated of rendezvous, with its carpeted staircase to the street, its vast potted palms, the impassive gold-braided suffragi at its door and the medley of snake-charmers, souvenir-sellers, dragomen, donkey-men, and miscellaneous touts who haunted the pavement outside, sometimes shouting to the toffs above to suggest a trip to the Pyramids, the purchase of a camel saddle or some small expression of *baksheesh*.

Everybody knew Shepheard's. The hotel's Golden Book was full of fame and royalty, and that welcoming terrace became a mirage-like objective for travellers labouring down the Nile out of Africa. There is a drawing of Stanley arriving there in 1890, after three years in the interior looking for Emin Pasha: he is dressed still in his pith helmet and high boots, and as the manager, in a frock-coat, clasps the explorer's right hand with both of his own, an Englishman on the terrace waves his hat and raises a cheer, a flounced lady lifts her *lorgnette*, and a porter in a tarboosh looks curiously through the front door of the hotel—'the fashionables of Cairo,' Stanley wrote, 'in staring at me every time I came out to take the air, made me uncommonly shy'. Rudolf von Slatin, escaping from eleven years' imprisonment by the Mahdi, made for Shepheard's to write his book *Fire and Sword in the Sudan*: he became one of the hotel's best-known regulars, and a staff with a taste for honorifics loved

referring to him by his full sonorous title—General Baron Sir Rudolf von Slatin Pasha.[1] It was at Shepheard's, too, that Gordon had stayed, impatiently waiting for Cook's to complete the travel arrangements, before he left Cairo in 1883 for Khartoum and his death. Shepheard's was a legend already, and one of the classic travel experiences of the imperial age was to sit on its terrace on a winter morning, with a Turkish coffee and a sticky cake, watching a parade march by outside—the tarbooshed bandsmen puffing away at their bugles, the British commander ineffably superior on his horse, and in front Shepheard's own water-man laying the dust with squirts from his leather water-bag, backing away before the advancing military, and chivvied by testy superiors on the pavement.

No other hotel was quite so famous, but several more were as familiar to the travellers of Empire as home itself. There was the Casino Palace at Port Said, with its huge glass-roofed terrace, looking across the mole to where the P. and O. lay coaling, or the Crescent at Aden, which opened directly upon the British Army's horrible hot parade ground. At Bombay they were building the monumental Taj Mahal, which was to be the most imposing building in the city, outshining even the great structures of Government, and standing flamboyantly striped, turreted and balconied upon the Apollo Bund, the very first thing to greet the new arrival in India. At Colombo there was the G.O.H.—the Grand Oriental Hotel—a huge lumpish hostelry called by *Murray's Handbook* 'one of the best hotels, if not the best, in the East'. At Calcutta there was the awful Great Eastern, monumental and morose, at Singapore Raffles', a delightfully sun-shaded, courtyarded, loose-limbed sort of hotel, famous for its long cool drinks and its food, notorious in those days for its squalid rooms. At Hong Kong the hotels on the waterfront, run on American lines, sent their own launches, house flags at the prow, to meet the liners steaming into harbour. All across Canada, wherever the Canadian Pacific Railway passed, enormous castle-like

[1] von Slatin, born in Austria in 1857, governed a Sudanese province under Gordon, and was captured by the Mahdi in 1883. He escaped to Egypt in 1895, returned to Khartoum with Kitchener, and became Inspector-General of the Sudan when Anglo-Egyptian rule was restored there.

hotels sprang up, spaciously called the Château This or That, and sometimes so dominating their cities that the hotel in the centre of Quebec has been popularly supposed, ever since, to be the ancient fortress that was the city's *raison d'être*.

All these were very grand hotels indeed.[1] They lived by the Empire, had mostly risen with its fortunes, and were now in their plushy, palmed and Electric-Illuminated prime. Perhaps more suggestive of the best imperial pleasures, though, were the houseboats for which the British had a particular fondness. At Aswan, high up the Nile, one could hire a *dahabia*, one of the long-prowed sailing-boats which still provided passenger service down to the Delta for those who could not afford Cook's steamer fares. This would be exquisitely converted by Cook's, and equipped down to the last table napkin, and it could be towed more or less where you wished, preferably within reach of one of the better hotels, for tea-dances or tennis. Even more delicious were the houseboats of Kashmir, moored on the celestial lake of Srinagar beneath the Karakoram, and served by floating shops that drifted out from town each morning. These quaint craft were devised because a Maharajah of Kashmir, fearing an influx of retired British officials into his arcardian State, forbade Europeans to own land there. The Europeans took to the water instead, and in about 1875 the first of the Kashmir houseboats were launched. They looked like little Thames-side chalets mounted on hulls, with dormer windows and shingle roofs, the whole slightly orientalized by curving prows: and on their decks the exiled British, gazing across the water towards the white ramparts beyond, took their tea and crumpets, did their embroidery, devised new phrases for their journals in uninterrupted content.

[1] Most of them still thrive. Shepheard's was destroyed in the Cairo riots of 1952, but has been rebuilt on an even better site, beside the Nile. The terrace of the Casino Palace at Port Said is sadly dingy now, but the hotel service is still geared to the passage of the India boats through the canal. The Crescent Hotel at Aden is still the best in town, while the Taj Mahal in Bombay remains the most imposing building in the city, and is perhaps the grandest hotel in Asia. The G.O.H. in Colombo has been redecorated in advanced colours and indigenous motifs, removing its last traces of imperial splendour, but Raffles has kept its character, and the Canadian Pacific hotels still boast in the Royal York at Toronto 'the largest hotel in the Commonwealth'—1,600 rooms, and an Imperial Lounge.

6

They had developed to a new pitch of finesse the art of living in tropical countries. The specialist outfitters of London offered all kinds of ingenious devices for defeating the equatorial climates—patent ice machines, spine-pads, thornproof linen, the Shikaree Tropical Hat, in white and brown canvas, from Henry Heath's Well Known Shoppe for Hattes in Oxford Street. The tent of a British Army officer in the tropics was a sight to see, with its portable writing-desk, its canvas camp bath, the gleaming boots laid out on their trees beside the 'Union Jack' Patent Field Boot Container, the taut white 'Up-Country' Mosquito Net and the 'Unique' Anti-Termite Matting on the floor. Private houses, though stuffily packed with the bric-à-brac of the day, were shaded by verandas and cooled by hand-powered fans, worked by invisible servants in the room next door (in the best-ordered households the punkah magically started swaying the moment you showed signs of pausing in a room, to glance at a picture or pin your hair up). Every kind of al fresco activity was popular. The British loved picnics, and camping parties, and boating, and often at Government Houses, if there were too many guests for the bedrooms, great comfortable tents would be erected on the lawn for the overflow.

Even so, the Victorians in their tropical possessions must have been fearfully hot and sticky. Their clothes were so heavy, they were so loaded down with protective devices like puttees (against snakes) and neckpads (against heat-stroke), that a dressy occasion must have been horribly uncomfortable. For the most part to be smart was to be dressed just as you would be at home in England, even though the temperature might be 109 degrees in the shade. Women used to order complete outfits from London, with dress, hat, gloves, bag and shoes to match (or if they could not afford it, at least took great pains to conceal the fact that their dresses had been made by a tailor in the bazaar). When one took a turn on the Maidan at Calcutta one wore a thick frock-coat and a top-hat. Men really did dress for dinner in remote tropical outposts, if only to keep some sense of root and order. The British soldier in the tropics,

though he changed into white uniform, still had his jacket brass-buttoned to the chin—and carefully dandified himself each evening, buttons polished and hair slicked, even if he had nowhere to go but the canteen in the cantonment. As if all this were not enough, a favourite recreation of the British was the fancy dress ball, to which guests often came weighed down with elaborate fineries—when Lord Roberts gave one at Simla in 1887, eighteen officers of the Royal Irish came in a body in long scarlet coats and powdered wigs.

There was an overpowering aura of closeness—one can scarcely speak of sweatiness in such a context—to the whole grandeur of Empire, the epauleted, gold-braided jackets, the heavy silks and long skirts, the dark brown paint of the Government offices. The taste of the late Victorians was ill suited to the administration of a tropical Empire. There is a picture of the Wiltshire Regiment officers' mess at Peshawar in 1886 which depressingly suggests this portentous clutter. The table is thick with regimental silver, trophies and elaborate oil lamps and sauceboats and pepper-pots and goblets, and the walls seem to sag beneath the weight of antlers. Flags are draped here and there, napkins are impeccably folded, and the sixteen chairs for the officers are packed so tightly together in the midst of it all that there looks scarcely room for the servant to manoeuvre a crested soup plate between them. The homes of the senior civilian officials were just as overloaded with consequence. Government House at Poona, where the Governor of Bombay spent his summers, was built in the château style, like a Canadian hotel, and had an eighty-foot tower, a grotto, a lake and innumerable gazebos, arbours and summer-houses. Inside it was burdened all over with dark wood panelling and chandeliers, festooned with pictures of kings and maharajahs, crammed with gigantic and lugubrious pieces of furniture. It must have been difficult indeed for the Governor, when wearing his sword for ceremonial receptions, to pass from one saloon to another: but he was used to it all—his other palace, in Bombay, had two dining-rooms, one for the dry weather, one for the monsoon.

7

They enjoyed themselves with tourism. The British, for all their

aloofness, were indefatigable sightseers. The Victoria Falls *very soon* became a tourist spectacle, and even India was full of the symptoms of the trade—the blackguardly guides, bowing obsequiously, the picture-postcard man at the Taj Mahal, or the chairs with long poles attached to them, in which the trippers from Bombay were carried by coolies up the long steep steps to the caves on Elephanta Island. A team of four guides was considered convenient for sightseers in Madras—'No 1 to lead, No 2 to see that he does it, No 3 to see that No 2 does his duty, while No 4 supervises the lot'. They habitually called British tourists 'My Lord', in the Empire of those days: Kipling says gharry-men in India used to warn off rival carriages by claiming they were 'rotten, My Lord, having been used by *natives*'.

The British enjoyed themselves with the theatre, too. Calcutta had four professional English-speaking theatres, Melbourne three, and there was even one in Rangoon—though most of them only played music-hall and harmless farce. Sometimes fairly distinguished companies from London undertook a tour of the more urbane imperial centres: Charles Carrington, one of the best *avant-garde* producers of the nineties, spent three years touring India, Australia, New Zealand and Egypt with Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Well-known musical companies from London toured the garrison theatres of India, and Thespians in the mellow tradition of ham and fly-by-night often turned up on the frontier stations; like the well-known Professor who was a familiar figure of the Rhodesian veldt, plodding with his sad troupe from one stand to the next, Hamlet to panto-mime. Amateur theatricals flourished almost everywhere, and seem to have formed an absolutely essential part of the imperial way. When Kipling wanted to invent a conversation to show the sameness of imperial conversation everywhere, this is what he wrote: 'And then, you know, after she had said *that* he was obliged to give the part to the other, and that made *them* furious, and the races were so near that nothing could be done, and Mrs —— said that it was altogether impossible.' The most familiar photograph of social life in the Empire of the nineties, to be found in faded sepia print in picture albums from British Columbia to the Cape, shows Colonel Hampstead, Mrs Rathbone, Miss Susan Walkley-Thomas and the Reverend Arthur Millstead, poised precariously in too much make-

up holding teacups, at a climactic moment of last year's production of *Caste*.[1]

And naturally they enjoyed themselves with sex. The late Victorians were, for all their later legend, as full-blooded as any other generation, and the annals of their imperialism are rich in sexual adventure. Frank Richards recalled, in his book *Old Soldier Sahib*, the irrepressible randiness of the British soldier abroad in those days. Commanding officers often established regimental brothels, to cope with it: in Burma the military authorities imported Japanese prostitutes, and most Indian garrison towns had brothels reserved for the white troops, inspected by military doctors for cleanliness and patrolled by military police, who did not hesitate to beat up any native seen approaching the girls. Itinerant whores—'sand-rats'—habitually followed any British regiment on the march in India, and the pimp's cry 'jiggy-jig, sahib' haunted the British soldier the moment he set foot outside his barracks.

As for the women of Empire, Kipling badly damaged their reputation for purity with his stories of the goings-on in the Indian hill stations. The historical novelist Maud Diver undertook to restore it in a book called *The Englishwoman in India*, but even she had to allow that the British grass widow in the hills had many temptations to resist. The two most insidious dangers, Miss Diver thought, were military men on leave and amateur theatricals, but many memsahibs fell too for the exotic allure of the East. Dennis Kincaid, an Indian civil servant, reported that they were often much moved by a well-known Pathan marching song called *Wounded Heart*, and sometimes asked to be told the words: but unfortunately the least obscene lines in the song, Kincaid said, were those of the final verse, which ran: 'There is a boy across the river with a — like a peach, but alas I cannot swim'.[2]

[1] A play (by T. W. Robertson) which seems to have obsessed the Empire, dealing as it did with a humble girl's marriage to an aristocratic guardsman, and his unexpected return from the colonial wars to dash the predictions of those who thought that never the twain would cleave.

[2] Kincaid tells this story in his exceedingly entertaining *British Social Life in India*, 1608–1937 (London, 1938). *Old Soldier Sahib* (London, 1936) was the first, and possibly the only, full account of a British private soldier's life under the Raj.

8

One easily detects pathos in these pleasures. These were often people putting a brave face upon it. Some were pretending to be grander than they were. Some were tortured by that cruel and incurable disease, home-sickness. Some were compensating for pleasures that England denied them. Some were just making the best of things, drinking themselves silly, gambling themselves broke. The first-generation emigrant was generally disillusioned, and hung on only for the sake of his children. The expatriate merchant only wanted to make his pile before he hurried home to Guildford or Inverness. Perhaps the only really happy men of Empire were the men of lofty duty: those to whom it was not a spree at all, nor even a passable way of spending a few profitable years, but a vocation. Real happiness emanates from the pages of the missionary journals, with their bright-eyed conviction of Christian opportunity: and they seem to have been genuinely happy men who sat in their tents dispensing justice to the backward peoples, decreeing imprisonment here, waiving a levy there, in the absolute knowledge that the Raj was right.

Morris. Pax Britannica.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Proconsuls

The sense of greatness keeps a nation great;
And mighty they who mighty can appear.
It may be that if hands of greed could steal
From England's grasp the envied orient prize,
This tide of gold would flood her still as now.
But were she the same England, made to feel
A brightness gone from out those starry eyes,
A splendour from that constellated brow?

William Watson

14

NORTHWARD from the Punjabi village of Kalka a winding and precipitous tonga road ran into the foothills of the Himalaya, the air becoming sweeter, the heat less oppressive as it climbed. There were pines and deodars about, and monkeys. High on a ridge to the east the traveller could see the military sanatorium of Daghshai, two or three barrack blocks and a very English church, poised on a narrow ridge overlooking the plains, and breathing the mountain air from the north. There was the bazaar town of Solon to pass on the way, where the local beer was brewed, and where swarthy hill-men, turbans fluttering, strode with sticks through scented market alleys: and then the road ascended steadily, in loops and double-tracks into the hills. It was a busy road throughout the summer, as the tongas of the British, blowing their horns, clip-clopped smartly through the labouring strings of mules, carts and livestock: and for one period of every year it became the most important road in India. Then, at the beginning of the hot season, the Viceroy himself took it, to escape from the miseries of Calcutta: and with his guards and his secretariat, his private staff and his public attendants, his Army headquarters, his Foreign Office, the envoys of foreign Powers, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, the representatives of the Indian Princes—with an infinity of files, an army of wagons, garries and chaises, the memsahibs with their carriage trunks and excited children, hangers-on of every kind, adventurers of every aspiration—bands and flags, foreign correspondents and Tailors By Appointment, military observers, Thomas Cook's men, bank clerks and estate agents and visiting parliamentarians—with all this caravanserai before and after him, up the Queen's Viceroy went to Simla, the summer capital of the Indian Empire.

2

Simla in 1897 was one of the most extraordinary places in the world. It was small, and set delectably in a bowl of the hills, in tiers on the south side of a ridge like an English watering-place, except for the grand mass of the Himalaya behind. From a distance it looked archetypically Anglo-Indian. Scattered among the wooded hills were the chalet-bungalows of the senior officials, and properly on an eminence stood the Gothic tower of Christ Church, with a bell made out of a mortar captured in the second Sikh War. There were pleasant gardens about, and a comfortable esplanade meandered along the ridge, with tea-shops here and there, and Wine, Spirit and Provision Merchants of Quality, and Hamilton's the jewellers from Calcutta (Established in the Reign of George III), and Phelps and Co., Civil, Military and Political Tailors, in their establishment at Albion House. A little lower a smudge of smoke and shanties marked the location of the Indian bazaar, and the town spilled away down the hillside in diminishing solidity, petering out in huts and shacks, until only the road itself was left threading a way through the trees to the distant plains below. At first sight Simla looked exactly what one would expect of a British hill station —quiet, sedate, and logically laid out.

This was not its style at all. Simla was a very brilliant, savage, ugly little town. The air was electric, thin enough to make you pant upstairs at first, sharp enough off the snows to keep you unnaturally alert and vivacious, almost feverish. No carriages were allowed in the centre of the town, except those of the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief and the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, so when you arrived there a porter hoisted your baggage on his back and led you stumbling up steep steps and winding lanes to your hotel: and when you strolled out through the lights of the evening for a first look around Simla, somehow the place did not feel quite solid. It was like a stage set, quivering, full of character actors, walking fast and talking hard. There were the British themselves, of course, glowing with the thrill of the move to the mountains, marvelling in their escape from the sultry oppression

of the plains and the sea-coast, looking forward to the balls and parties of the season, and pulling their wraps wryly around their shoulders as the evening chill set in. There were the hill Indians of the north, whom the British loved, warlike and confident people, with beards and gay colours on them, no nonsense about political rights and a steady hand with a rifle. And here and there in the streets, giving Simla a tantalizing hint of unknown places beyond the mountains, there strode groups of swarthy Tibetans—wide-set eyes and perpetual laughing chatter, bottle-green gowns open to the waist, pigtails, entrancing babies on their mothers' backs and a smell of untanned leather. There was an Italianate fizz to the piazzas of Simla after dark, as the evening crowds swung here and there, the lights shone out from shops and theatre, and down the steps off the Mall the bazaar people moved in silhouette against their flickering fires, in a haze of spice and woodsmoke.

3

In the morning Simla seemed different again, for in the brilliance of the mountain sun one could see with an awful clarity the monuments of its power. The style the British evolved for their offices in Simla was brutally functional. It depended upon girders. Each huge block, surrounded by open verandas, was held together with iron stanchions, like a bridge. This suggested to different observers, at one time or another, piles of disused tramcars, monstrous toast-racks, or the remains of junkyards salvaged by economical military engineers and put together wherever pieces could be found to fit. Stark, square and enormous, these preposterous buildings stood about the ridge with an air of plated aloofness, like armadillos, facing this way and that, with roofs of corrugated iron and complicated external staircases. Physically they cast a blight upon the town: and there was something dismal to the thought of the scribbling hundreds inside them, the cogs of an Empire revolving in so many iron boxes on a hillside.[1]

[1] When Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944) went to India in 1913 to build the new imperial capital at Delhi, he inspected Simla first and was appalled. 'If one was told the monkeys had built it all one could only say, "What wonderful monkeys—they must be shot in case they do it again. . . ."'

The Mall ran among them, gently undulating, sometimes opening out into a square in the Venetian manner; and sheltering demurely out of the limelight, up garden paths lined with dahlias or lupins, were the houses of the great, with names like Snowdon, Knockdrin, Hawthorne and The Gables. The Commander-in-Chief lived in one, the Foreign Secretary in another, the Manager of the Mercantile Bank in a third, and above and beyond them all, with a private chapel and sundry staff houses, was the Viceroy's new palace, finished in 1888 and decorated throughout by Messrs Maple and Co., of Tottenham Court Road.

It was a surprisingly long way from one end of Simla to another —from Barnes Court, say, where the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab lived, to the Viceregal estate behind its monumental guard-house at the western extremity of the ridge. A few old *jhampans* could still be hired—curtained sedan-chairs like four-poster beds, carried by four coolies apiece: but the normal means of public transport was the four-man rickshaw, a wickerwork vehicle on high spindly wheels, which was propelled at dizzy speed through the streets, its crew alternately heaving, braking, swivelling and pushing with the desperation of tobogganers, and reaching a climax in their kinetic energies in propelling the thing fast enough down one hill to get it up the steep slope of the next.

4

Seven thousand feet up, eighty miles from a railway line, 750 miles from a port, Simla was the oddest and most inaccessible of the world's great capitals. The mails were conveyed to railhead at Kalka by two-pony tongas, at breakneck speed, but the road was so rough that they sometimes had their springs packed with bamboo wrappings to lessen the jolts, and when the rivers near Kalka were flooded elephants sometimes had to be commandeered, to convey the imperial dispatches across the waters to the Viceroy.

From Simla were directed the affairs of 308 million people—two and a half times the population, by Gibbon's estimate, of the Roman Empire at its climax—protected by the greatest army in Asia, and forming a pendant to Britain itself in the immense balance of

Empire. The world recognized that India was a great Power in itself. It was an Empire of its own, active as well as passive. Most of the bigger nations had their representatives at Simla, and the little hill station on the ridge cast its summer shadow wide. Its writ ran to the Red Sea one way, the frontiers of Siam the other. Aden, Perim, Socotra, Burma, Somaliland were all governed from India. Indian currency was the legal tender of Zanzibar and British East Africa, Indian mints coined the dollars of Singapore and Hong Kong. The proliferation of India, as we have seen, was represented by hundreds of thousands of her citizens scattered across the oceans, and the Indian Army, too, had seen service in many parts of the world. When Indian troops were sent to Malta in 1878 it aroused a furore in England, and Disraeli was accused of selling the Empire to the barbarians. Since then the use of Indian troops in other parts of the Empire had become a commonplace. In the past half-century Indian soldiers, under British officers, had served in China, Persia, Ethiopia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Egypt and East Africa, and in 1897 they were advancing up the Nile with Kitchener. It was the possession of India that made the Empire a military Power—'an English barrack in the Oriental seas', Salisbury had once called it. Its Regular Army was not large—some 160,000 men—but it was all voluntary, and it was recruited chiefly from the martial peoples of the north, Sikhs, Punjabis, Pathans, whose fighting qualities were celebrated everywhere.

It was from Simla, in the summer-time, that the British supervised the eastern half of their Empire. Upon the power and wealth of India depended the security of the eastern trade, of Australia and New Zealand, of the great commercial enterprises of the Far East. The strength of India, so many strategists thought, alone prevented Russia from spilling through the Himalayan passes into south-east Asia, and the preoccupations of the generals in Simla were important to the whole world. 'Everything is so English and unpicturesque here', the artist Val Prinsep[1] wrote during a visit to Simla, 'that

[1] Prinsep (1838–1904) was the son of a well-known Indian administrator, and a nephew of James Prinsep of Prinsep's Ghat. Born in Calcutta and destined for the I.C.S. himself, he took up art instead, returning to India only to paint, on Government commission, a picture of the great Durbar of 1877, when Victoria was proclaimed Queen-Empress.

except the people one meets are those who rule and make history—a fact one can hardly realize—one would fancy oneself at Margate.'

It *was* hard to realize, but it was true. There was substance to the fantasy of Simla. The British did their best to live up to the grandeur of their position, and though the town was commonly known to disrespectful juniors as The Abode of the Little Tin Gods, still a good deal of solid splendour surrounded the arrangements up there. The Viceroy himself was to be glimpsed on Sunday mornings resplendently driving to church in his carriage, a weekly second coming. His palace on the hill was so luxurious that many people thought Indian income tax, introduced in 1886, had been devised to pay for it. Its household staff comprised 300 domestics and 100 cooks, and in one recent season the Vicereine had presided over twelve big dinners (up to fifty guests), twenty-nine small ones, a State ball, a fancy dress ball, a children's ball, two garden parties, two evening parties and six dances of 250 people each. The guards at the gatehouse, inspired by all this display, used to salute with such a reverberation of small arms that more than once the horses of eminent visitors had been known to turn tail at the clash, and bolt headlong back along the Mall.

In this capital as in any other, the social graces and felinities intensely thrived, and the suburban instinct of Victorian life, fostered so paradoxically by the Queen-Empress, found its strangest expression in Simla. The houses of the Field-Marshals and Foreign Secretaries were not, as foreigners might expect, replicas of great country houses at home, such as might be said to illustrate the patrician flowering of England. Still less did they model themselves upon the palaces of earlier Indian conquerors. They were essentially villas, often done in half-timber and plaster, with decorous gardens and gravel drives, ferns in hanging wire baskets, and gates with their names upon them. With their mullioned windows and the ramblers entwined about their porches, they looked all lavender leisure: except for the swaggering Sikh guards who paced, with scimitars and tremendous beards, up and down outside the threshold.

Brittle, vivid, snobby, like all centres of power Simla seethed with ambition and intrigue. Society was overwhelmingly official—only Army officers and Civil Servants, for example, could be full

members of the principal Simla club—and there was a hot-house feeling to the place. Peliti's restaurant, beside the bridge at the eastern end of the Mall, was the traditional hotbed of gossip, where an excellent view might be obtained of the current scandal, and the latest handsome arrival from the Frontier, or winsome bride fresh out from Hertfordshire, might be viewed and analysed to advantage. This was the hunting-ground of Kipling's allegorical Anglo-Indian chatelaines, those *grandes dames* of Empire, with the adoring young subalterns and civilians at their feet, and their private channels of communication, via Tony or dear Major Lansdowne, direct to the Secretariat itself. Kipling, heightened his effects, but there really was a good deal of philandering, gambling and heavy drinking in Simla: if visitors from England thought it like Margate, to innocents from upcountry, where the nearest thing to vice was often a round of gin-rummy over a hurricane lamp, it sometimes seemed a very Paris.

The English in Simla knew each other, for the most part, all too well. They had grown up together in the imperial service, and they had few illusions about each other or each other's wives. It was the outsiders who were taken aback by the place: the Vicereines, who had often never been to India before, and generally loathed Simla, or the young girls fresh from England, to whom this high and startling place, rich with scarlet uniforms and brown young English faces, must have seemed one of the most exciting towns imaginable. Everything was overdrawn at Simla. Eight balls and dances at the Viceroy's Lodge alone! Even the monkeys were so bold that they habitually came through people's windows to steal fruit, and could often be heard thrumming with their feet on the iron roofs above: and constantly through the gossip and the music of the string orchestras ran the murmur of great power, a *basso profondo* to Simla's frivolities.[1]

[1] Simla, now the capital of a hill province called Himachal Pradesh, has changed surprisingly little, though it has not been the summer capital of India since the Second World War. Its size is much the same, and there are still no wheeled vehicles, rickshaws excepted, in its central streets. The Viceregal Lodge is now the Indian Institute for Advanced Studies. The great Government buildings are military headquarters of one kind or another, or provincial offices. The Tibetans in the streets have been augmented by

5

The British Government in India was a despotism of great efficiency, in which the Indians had virtually no say. The lower echelons of the administration were filled mostly by Indians, those babus whose humble respect, elaborate Welsh-sounding English and pitiful efforts to Westernize themselves so amused and irritated their rulers. In the middle ranks there were many Indians in minor executive positions, office superintendents, assistant secretaries, extra assistant commissioners. But the Indian Civil Service proper, the senior branch of the Government, was almost locked. Indians were free to compete in the I.C.S. entry examination, but the odds were heavily weighted against them. Their education was not geared to the examination, the papers were in English, they had to go to London to sit—the journey itself was against the tenets of Hindu orthodoxy, and some of the earliest Indian candidates dared not tell even their own parents that they were going. By 1897 only a few very clever Hindus and Parsees had managed to get in, and were acting as assistant magistrates and collectors: for the rest the I.C.S., the real Government of India, was absolutely British.

At the top of it stood the Viceroy, who combined the offices of a President and a Prime Minister, was responsible only to London, and was generally a nobleman with no previous Indian experience, appointed on political grounds for a five-year term. He enjoyed some of the privileges of an independent ruler. India decreed its own tariffs, for example—British officers arriving to serve in India had to pay customs duty on their saddlery—and in the years 1896 and 1897 there was no legislation at Westminster dealing with Indian affairs. The

hundreds of refugees from over the mountains, and most of the tea-shops, tailors, gunsmiths and Crown jewellers have vanished with the Raj. The greatest change, though, has been the arrival of the narrow-gauge railway, which reached Simla in 1903: this is still served, in 1968, by a truly Viceregal motor-carriage, painted a spotless white, and looking like an elegant cross between a snow-plough and a beautifully maintained Vintage Rolls—shiny leather seats, spade-handles on its doors, and on the front an enormous brass starting-handle. Only the imperial crest is missing.

Viceroy's Council was in effect a Cabinet, and almost all its Ministers were Civil Servants, each the head of a Government department. It is true that the Commander-in-Chief attended as an extra member, and that sometimes the Viceroy, by summoning a dozen extra members, turned the Council into a legislative assembly, when the public was admitted to its sessions, and sat on a row of dining-room chairs. But the Viceroy could override its decisions anyway, and the power of the bureaucracy remained unchallenged.

Defence, foreign affairs, national finance, the railways, posts and telegraphs were all looked after by this Central Government. In other ways India was administered by the provincial governments, no less completely in the hands of the I.C.S. The seven provinces were run almost as separate States. Two of them, the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay, had kept not only their pre-Mutiny titles, but also the right to communicate directly with London, without reference to the Viceroy, who sometimes heard what was happening there only by reading the newspapers. The provinces had been carved out, by history and politics, in shapes that bore little relation to geography, ethnography, or even language, and they had been disciplined into entities by the British. In each the head of the administration—Governor, Lieutenant-Governor or Chief Commissioner—had his own council of Civil Servants and nominated legislature, and the system of government was elaborate. In Bombay, for example, there were departments of Public Works, Justice, Land Records, Municipality and Cantonments, Revenue Survey, Politics, Education, Police, Forests, Medicine, Finance, Gaols, Posts, Telegraphs, Customs, Salt, Opium, Excise, Income Tax, Stamps and Stationery, Registration, besides a Marine Department, an Archaeological Survey, an Inspectorate of Steam Boilers and Prime Movers, and a Directorate of the Government Observatory. All these departments had British chiefs: multiply them by eight or nine, and you will have some idea how many positions of great administrative authority were held by Englishmen in the India of the nineties.

Every I.C.S. man first went through the mill of the districts. India's provinces were subdivided into some 250 districts, each presided over by an officer called sometimes a collector-magistrate, sometimes a deputy commissioner. The district was the basic

administrative unit of British India, and it was complete in itself, its head being responsible for almost anything that happened in it. He was the local representative of the Crown: all over India, on Jubilee Day, the district officers held their own local Durbars, and received their local notables, the petty chieftains, the Brahmins or the great landlords, graciously in a marquee on behalf of the Queen-Empress. The district officer was also the tax official, which is why he was sometimes called a collector. 'The main work of the Indian Administration', it was officially declared, 'is the assessment of the land tax', the chief source of revenue, and the man in the district spent much of his time inspecting crops, checking measurements, allotting ownerships and listening to the arguments of rival landlords. He was at once the chief of police and the chief magistrate of the district, a combination that was often criticized. On most working days of the week he presided over his court, sometimes in a musty town courthouse, blazing hot and bursting to the doors, sometimes in a tent in the field, with prisoners and litigants loitering on the grass outside, and a stream of spectators wandering in twos and threes from the village along the track.

Such a camp court was everybody's image of the White Man's Burden. The magistrate was often absurdly young, and his court equipment consisted of a couple of camp chairs and a collapsible desk. On the ground before it his clerks sat cross-legged, each with an inkhorn, and at the door his orderly stood peremptorily on guard, dressed in a scarlet coat and sash. Into this simple setting, the furthest and humblest preliminary to the Privy Council, filed the prisoners and the applicants, bowing low to the representative of the Raj—villains in irons, deputations of villagers, people who wanted to argue about the water rates, or demanded an audit of the village accounts, or accused their neighbours of witchcraft, or thought they were entitled to a rebate of last year's land tax—murderers occasionally, thieves nearly always, deserted soldiers, poor old women with no visible means of support, lost children and argumentative local lawyers. The district officer must have answers for them all. The clerks scratched away in their big books; the orderly ushered them in with pompous command, like a sergeant-major; and when the court was over the district officer and his staff packed up the desk,

the chairs, the tent and the law books in camel carts, and plodded across the plains to the next session.

6

So from top to bottom, Viceregal Lodge to portable courthouse, the Indian Civil Service ruled India. This was a land of fabulous variety, a world of its own. At least 800 languages were spoken there, including tongues like Karen, Mon, Shan, Bhil, Garo and Halbi, which not more than a handful of scholars elsewhere in the world had ever had the opportunity to learn. There were 9 million Indians classed still as aborigines, and there was a dizzy profusion of more advanced minorities: jangling stalwarts from the Rajput States, noble Sikhs from the north, the clever and disputatious Bengalis, Pathan warriors from the north-west frontier, people from Assam, Sikkim and Bhutan with a Mongol slant to their eyes, exquisitely fragile Dravidians from the south, strange men from the distant Andamans, the Nicobars, the Shan Hills or Baluchistan. Across this marvellous country the inflexible order of the I.C.S. was laid, province by province, the whole governed by an all-embracing code of rules, moving to a sure and tested rhythm of novitiate, experience, promotion and protocol. Mahatma Gandhi called the I.C.S. 'the most powerful secret corporation the world has ever known', and in India as a whole it had acquired a prestige so towering that to many simple people it seemed infallible, if not divine.

The Central Government of this system was heavily formal, rigid with bureaucracy and protocol—'Do you know Mrs Herbert of Public Works?' the Anglo-Indian hostesses used to say. 'May I introduce Miss Entwhistle of Irrigation?' The I.C.S. had not much changed its method for half a century, and its main arteries were a little clogged. Its duties were much wider than the duties of a contemporary Government at home: in some ways India was almost a Socialist country, so involved was the State in matters like landownership, transport, forestry, education, medicine and police work, and in running the official monopolies of salt and opium. All this led to a vast subsidiary establishment—there were nearly 3 million employees in the public service—and a proliferation of paper work.

Life was short in India, transfers from office to office were frequent, and the only way of maintaining continuity seemed to be to write everything down. On the Indian trains the ticket collecter wrote down the number of your ticket on a piece of paper, to be consigned eventually, with millions more, to Heaven knows what mysterious and meaningless archive. Everybody made fun of the bumbling bureaucracy of Simla, even sometimes its own bureaucrats, so seriously did it take itself.

In theory there was almost no contingency for which the files did not provide a precedent, or the regulations decree a solution. Take, for example, the regulations laid down for Joining Time, the time allowed to an officer to proceed from one station to another, when he was transferred. 'Joining Time is calculated as follows, subject to a maximum of 40 days. (Sundays not actually spent in travelling are not included in the calculation.) Six days for preparation, and in addition thereto, for the portion of the journey which the Officer travels, or might travel, a day for each: by railway, 200 miles, by Ocean Steamer, 150 miles, River Steamer 80 miles, Mail Cart or other public stage conveyance drawn by horse, 80 miles, or any other way, 15 miles, or any longer time actually occupied in the journey. During that time the Officer will draw pay or salary which he drew in his old appointment, or that which he will draw on joining his new appointment, whichever may be less.'

In the field the system was far more flexible. Though India had a surfeit of senior British officials, the British cadre as a whole was very small. There were perhaps 20,000 Britons in India in the nineties, not counting soldiers of the British forces stationed there. About half were business people, and another 3,000 British officers of the Indian Army. A few hundred Britons worked in the lower ranks of the public service, as engine drivers, port technicians, postmasters. There remained some 1,300 British members of the I.C.S., upon whose shoulders rested the responsibility for governing 300 million souls. At the centre all might be done by the book. On the perimeters the district officer generally had to make up his own mind, without reference to precedent or senior opinion—in Mymensingh, East Bengal, one district officer was responsible for 6,000 square miles of territory and 4 million people, which left him little time for

consultation. In dealing with sudden emergencies, in arbitrating unexpected disputes, in instant decisions on matters of life and death, the British ruler of India was expected to obey his common sense, and do what he thought was right in the long run—fortified as he was by those values of manly self-reliance without which the Indian Civil Service would probably never have accepted him in the first place.

7

But however original the young officers in the field, the Raj did emanate a certain worthy dullness. Nearly every visitor felt it, and contrasted it ruefully with that gift for graceful hedonism and skullduggery which legend had long since bestowed upon the early adventurers of British India. Fortunately for the dazzle of India, not so far from any district officer's bungalow there was sure to be a Native State, where Joining Time did not apply, and the public school code was not so scrupulously enforced. When they talked of British India then they were not merely blowing a trumpet. India was all red on the map, but redder in some parts than others, for embedded in the whole were more than 600 Native States in whose territories the British did not directly govern. India and British India meant two different things. In British India the Queen's rule was direct to the point of starkness. In the Native States—generally those which had submitted peacefully to the Raj, instead of fighting back—the British had tried their first experiments in indirect rule.

The States varied in size from villages to nations. They contained 77 million inhabitants altogether, about a quarter of the whole, and by the nature of British history in India only a few insignificant States possessed an outlet to the sea. The Raj fenced them in. Ostensibly they were independent Powers, really they were puppets, whose rulers would be rash indeed to disregard the wishes of the Raj, and in whose capital there lived a British Resident or Adviser, in a palace of his own, as a reminder of the power behind the throne. This was described as being governed 'with the help, and under the advice, of a British political officer', and it was said that while some of the States were almost completely independent, 'others

require more assistance or stricter control'. It was largely the presence of these princely feudatories, vast and rich like Mysore and Hyderabad, petty and indigent like Thonk, which gave to India still some of the surprise and splendour of the Moguls, with their caparisoned elephants and their jewelled audience chambers.

The authority of each prince, we are told, was limited by his treaties with the suzerain Government, which 'interferes when any chief misgoverns his people; rebukes, and if needful, removes the oppressor; protects the weak; and firmly imposes peace upon all'. The treaties varied from State to State. Mysore, which was advanced enough to have a kind of Parliament, agreed simply to 'act in conformity with the advice of the Resident in all important matters'. Lesser States, nearly all medieval autocracies, found their obligations spelt out in fussier detail. They could not, for example, employ British subjects without the sanction of the British Government, and British applicants for jobs were carefully screened for subversive tendencies. Governesses for princely households were actually supplied by the Raj, for part of the system was an imperial grooming of young princes. Often this was astonishingly successful. Moulded by nannies, tutors, advisers, the example of visiting officials and perhaps the schooling of Eton and Oxford, many of the princes became quasi-Englishmen themselves—English aristocrats buffed to an oriental polish. Such a magnificent heightening of their own taste much appealed to the English, who greatly coveted invitations to the grander Indian principalities, to shoot tiger or play polo. It was Sir Roper Lethbridge, K.C.I.E., who compiled *The Golden Book of India*, A Genealogical and Biographical Dictionary of the Ruling Princes, Chiefs, Nobles and Other Personages, Titled or Decorated, of the Indian Empire—'probably destined to take rank', *The Times* said, 'as the recognized *Peerage of India*'. Life in the States appealed to the Indians, too. The administration was generally shaky, and personal liberties could be precarious, but there was a steady flow of immigrants out of British India into the Native States—some escaping to easier penal systems, but many just pining for colour, variety and a little inconsequence.

Let us, too, excuse ourselves for a moment from the order of British India, and slip across the frontier to one of the most cele-

brated and colourful of the States, Jaipur—generally spelt Jeypur in those days, and lying almost in the heart of northern India, among the rocks and flaming sands of Rajputana. The Maharajah of Jaipur possessed an estate of some 15,000 square miles, with $2\frac{1}{2}$ million tenants, and he governed it according to the most dashing traditions of his Rajput forebears, descended from the epic heroes of medieval India. The Muslim conquerors of India had never been able to subdue the flare of these Hindu princes, and the British Raj had scarcely toned them down.

The capital, Jaipur itself, had been planned by an eighteenth-century Maharajah of astronomical interests, Jai Singh, and it was laid out with noble precision, and plastered throughout in a soft pink. The centre of the city was occupied by the sprawl of the palace, with shaded gardens and terraced arcades, trees full of monkeys, a marble audience chamber and a majestic series of stables: the Maharajah kept rather more than a thousand horses, each with its personal groom—one eminent horse had *four* grooms. Behind the palace stood a famous Hindu temple, in front was Jai Singh's observatory, a field of strange quadrants, pits and towers. Immensely wide streets intersected this capital, and along them the people streamed in perpetual pageantry—a cavalier citizenry; swathed about in scarlet and turbans, the men tall and handsome in a predatory style, the women slim and scrawny, jangling from head to ankle with bangles, amulets, bracelets, necklaces and gold chains, so that every movement was an orchestration, and one heard their approach in rhythmic clankings round the corner. Sometimes a gold-hung elephant trundled by, its liveried mahout high above the street crowds, and sometimes a great nobleman passed in a palanquin, with a train of servants at the trot behind. Beyond the city walls lay the ancient capital of Amber, with a deserted palace on one hill and the Maharajah's army poised in their barracks on another: all around stretched the deserts of Rajputana, camel trains loping towards the city gates, and fluttering knots of peasants hastening to market.

No city in Asia could be much more Asian, and it was often a relief to take the train to Jaipur, when the symmetry and rectitude of British India seemed more than usually lowering, or one really could not stand another evening of bridge with the Thompsons

of Revenue Survey. But it was an illusion. Implanted deep in the heart of Jaipur was the authority of the Raj. Despite exotic appearances, the British had been the real power in Jaipur for more than sixty years. The British Resident lived in a substantial mansion conveniently close to the Rustom Family Hotel, and it was to his office that one applied for permission to travel about the State, view its antiquities, or do business with its merchants. He would issue passes to view the Maharajah's stables (the English trainer there had, of course, been appointed with his approval). He would arrange introductions to notables of Jaipur. If one wished to visit Amber, the Resident would, 'as a rule, kindly ask the State to send an elephant to meet the traveller'.

The handful of Englishmen living in Jaipur had, under the patronage of the Maharajah, left a characteristic mark upon the place. 'The Maharajah gave the order', said Kipling of the lovely palace pleasure gardens, 'and Yakub Sahib made the garden'—Yakub Sahib being a Mr Jacob, of a well-known Anglo-Indian name. Two Englishmen had built the vast and awful museum, named the Albert Hall and surrounded by ornamental gardens, and an Englishman ran it. Englishmen managed the State railways, manned the electric light plant, trained the Maharajah's forces, and in the centre of the public gardens stood a large statue of Lord Mayo, Viceroy of India in the 1860s. Even if the visitor missed all these intimations of power, had no need of the Resident and evaded the Albert Hall, even so he could not ignore the hovering omnipotence of the Raj: for high and very large above the city of Jaipur the single word WELCOME had been painted in white letters on a hill, to commemorate a recent visit to this Protected Native State by Edward Prince of Wales, heir to the Queen-Empress.[1]

[1] Jaipur is now the capital of the Indian province called Rajasthan, though its Maharajah is still rich and powerful. There are few signs that it ever owed allegiance to the British, beyond the Albert Hall and the photographs of polo-playing princes in the best hotel (itself one of the Maharajah's properties). Perhaps, in a place of such fiery character, the suzerainty of the Raj was more flimsy than it seemed in 1897. When Bishop Heber the hymn-writer visited the State earlier in the century, he was given a present by the Maharanee consisting of two horses and an elephant. The elephant was so vicious that nobody could go near it, and of the horses one was 'as lame as a cat' and the other at least thirty years old.

8

The Viceroy knew that his was a unique imperial trust. Even in 1897, one suspects, the British might have abandoned most of the Empire with reasonable sang-froid. India was a separate case. It seemed to the British that their greatness, their wealth, even their very character depended upon the possession of this distant prodigy. India was the justification of Empire by force—the imposition of standards upon a weaker people, for their own good as well as Britain's. 'The true fulcrum of Asiatic dominion', Curzon had written in 1894, 'seems to me increasingly to lie in Hindustan': the secret of the mastery of the world was, 'if they only knew it, in the possession of the British people'. Since the Indian Mutiny India had seemed, too, a peculiarly royal sort of dominion. Victoria once noted in her diary, before the end of the East India Company, 'a universal feeling that India should belong to *me*'. The British agreed with the poet William Watson, that England could never be the same without India, that brightness in her starry eyes, that splendour on her constellated brow.

India was certainly a valuable piece of property, and mostly self-sustaining, for the cost of governing and defending it was borne out of Indian taxes, and even the Indian Army, constantly though it served in imperial causes elsewhere, cost the British scarcely a penny. The British had sunk a lot of money in India—more than £270 million, or a fifth of their entire overseas investment—and 19 per cent of their exports went there. In the more liberal years of the century the British had often looked askance at the authoritarian rule exerted on their behalf in India. 'Public opinion does not know what to make of it,' Seeley had written, 'but looks with blank indignation and despair upon a Government which seems utterly un-English, which is bureaucratic and in the hands of a ruling race, which rests mainly on military force, which raises its revenues, not in the European fashion, but by monopolies of salt and opium and by taking the place of a universal landlord, and in a hundred other ways departs from the traditions of England.' But political values were coarser now, India did not much disturb the public conscience at home, and the Viceroy was seldom plagued by radical questions

in the House of Commons, or worse still radical parliamentarians on his doorstep. He knew that public opinion now overwhelmingly supported absolute British rule in India: there were, after all, parts of Calcutta worth £40,000 an acre, and one did not play fast and loose with such stakes.

Protecting the Indian stakes, indeed, was one of the prime purposes of British foreign policy. British Governments were no longer afraid that their representatives in India would break away from Whitehall's control altogether, to set up some astonishing republic of their own. They were, though, always afraid that another Power might grab the country, or cut it off from London. Lord Rosebery once declared that British foreign policy was essentially an Indian policy, 'mainly guided by considerations of what was best for our Indian Empire'. Certainly the creation of the new Empire in Africa was largely impelled by anxiety over the routes to India. The military planners in Simla were perpetually obsessed with the safety of this immense dominion, so thinly ruled and guarded, and in particular with the menace they supposed to come from the Russians along their northern frontiers.

Much of Victorian imperial history had depended upon the fear of Russian intentions—it was Russia, you will remember, that the music-hall audiences had in mind when they first sang the Jingo song. The most vulnerable frontier point of all lay in the north-west corner of India, in the tangled country around Afghanistan—Alexander's gateway to India. It was a double anxiety. Afghanistan itself was a very unreliable neighbour, and the frontier area was inhabited by lawless Muslim tribes owing no very definite allegiance to anybody, and making it exceedingly difficult to establish a firm line of defence. This was the country of the Great Game. Behind it, or so the British supposed, the Russians were moving inexorably east and south, absorbing one after the other the Khans of Central Asia, and preparing the encirclement of India. They were already building a railway across Siberia to the Far East, and rumour had them railway-building in Turkestan, too, and planning an annexation of Tibet—whose southern frontier, theoretically drawn along the summits of the Himalaya, ran actually within sight of Simla. Twice Britain and Russia had almost come to blows—in 1885

the Stationery Office had gone so far as to print documents declaring a state of war. Twice the British had launched campaigns against the Afghans to secure the gap. Repeated scares and crises kept the north-west always in their minds, and rumours of Russian mayhem among the tribes percolated constantly through Simla.

The search for a 'scientific frontier' was endless. In the east the British had now taken all Burma, and would perhaps have moved into Siam, too, if it were not for the French in Indo-China. In the west they had wavered between standing firm on the line of the Indus, well within India proper, or pursuing a 'forward policy' and posting their troops as close to the Russians as possible. Sometimes they had thought the actual possession of Afghanistan necessary. Sometimes they had settled for a policy that would merely keep the Russians out of Kabul, too. They alternately occupied and withdrew from several remote outposts in the Hindu Kush: and the legend of British arms in India, fostered so brilliantly by Kipling, was born out of the rocks and wadis of the north-west, where the savage tribesmen lay in ambush behind the next rock, the Afghans brooded behind the tribes, and behind all stood the Russians.

Since 1893 the Indo-Afghan frontier had been demarcated, and the British were building up Afghanistan as a buffer State, with gifts of arms and money. At the same time they were trying for the first time to subdue the tribes who lived in semi-independence on the Indian side of the line. Roads were built, boundary posts set up, forts established throughout the territories of the Afridis, the Mahsuds, the Waziris, the people of Swat, Gilgit and Chitral. Once content with controlling the plains at the foot of the mountains, the British now intended to hold the heads of all the passes, and since 1895 Chritral, far to the north in the Hindu Kush, had been permanently garrisoned.

All this offered many excitements to the British—Anglo-Indians were often accused of fostering Russophobia at home, in order to keep the Great Game alive. The tribespeople, though, deeply resented the new interference. A holy man known to the British as the Mad Fakir, and described by Winston Churchill as 'a priest of great age and of peculiar holiness', travelled around inciting them to rebellion. He was helped by the news just reaching those distant provinces of Muslim triumphs elsewhere in the world: the Sultan of Turkey had

proclaimed himself Caliph, the Turks had defeated the Christian Greeks in war, the British themselves were having a difficult time against the Mahdi. There were wild stories of imperial reverses—the Suez Canal was said to have been seized by the Turks and leased to Russia—and the Mullah claimed that the Faithful could never be hurt by British bullets, and used to display a mild bruise on his own leg which he said was the only result of a direct hit from a 12 pound shell. Serious trouble was brewing on the frontier. British reinforcements were already on their way, punitive expeditions were common, dark rumours of Russian conspiracy or intervention flowed freely down to Simla.

There was a man living in the town called A. N. Jacob, a curiosity dealer, a mesmerist and a conjurer. He had been rich in his time, but had been ruined by an action he brought against the Nizam of Hyderabad, who had refused to pay for a diamond brooch Jacob had sold him. As a result he was boycotted in all the Indian States, the source of his wealth, and was reduced to a modest business with the Anglo-Indians, living in a house partly furnished with pieces from the Brighton Pavilion (the Nizam had bought them from the British Government).[1] Jacob was a mysterious man, immortalized by Kipling as Lurgan Sahib in *Kim*, with his eyes whose pupils eerily closed and dilated, his genius for disguise, his strangely foreign English, his unexplained contacts with princely house and underworld, his curio shop cluttered with devil-masks, Buddhas, prayer-wheels, samovars, Persian water-jugs and spears. The simpler Indians naturally assumed this queer figure to be a magician, but the British, no less baffled, placed him in a category just as self-evident: Russian spy.[2]

9

It was a bad year in India, and the Jubilee celebrations in Simla were sadly muted. In Calcutta, the Viceroy's other home, there had been

[1] Some of them may now be seen in the Victoria Memorial Museum at Calcutta.

[2] The wide experience of the Indian security services in dealing with the dangers of Russian subversion was for long reflected in the counter-espionage organization at home, whose agencies employed many former Indian police officers at least until the Second World War.

a terrible earthquake, causing many deaths, and so weakening the structures of the city that they dared not fire a Jubilee salute, nor even thunder out a hymn on the Cathedral organ. In Bombay there was plague. In Orissa there was famine. The frontier was aflame with tribal violence. India had just abandoned the silver standard, and was in economic difficulty. In Bengal and in Bombay there was political trouble, remote enough from the Abode of the Little Tin Gods, but serious enough to disturb the more far-sighted of the seers. There was not much air of festivity in Simla that June. Only a few parades, church services and processions of notables marked the occasion of Jubilee, and perhaps a few of the memsahibs quoted to each other, with indulgent giggles, Targo Mindien's Diamond Jubilee Rhyme:

Arise! fair Venus, my dream in Beauty; refulgence! forth
from Father Time's liquid silver sea,
In all thy dazzling splendour, with thy magic wand from
Love, it is the Empress-Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Lord Elgin, the Viceroy, was frankly bored. He had never much wanted to be Viceroy, and in this he was not alone, for oddly enough eager Viceroys were hard to find. The significance of the office was almost beyond ambition. The Viceroy of India had few peers in Asia. The Tsar of Russia, the Emperor of China were scarcely his superiors, the Shah of Persia and the King of Siam trod carefully in his presence, the Amir of Afghanistan and the King of Nepal were frankly at his mercy, the Dalai Lama would be well advised to respect his wishes and the King of Burma was actually his prisoner.[1] He occupied the throne of Akhbar and Aurangzebe, he stood in the conquering line of Alexander, and he was officially said to *reign*, like a king in his own right. Yet it was a kind of exile for an Englishman. The most able men generally preferred to pursue greatness at home, living in gentler palaces in greener fields, and few Viceroys had been of the very first rank, as statesmen or even as administrators.

For all that pomp, all that subservient respect, the State balls

[1] He had been since 1885, when King Thebaw, his two queens and his mother-in-law were taken prisoner at the end of the third Anglo-Burmese war, and sent to live at Ratnagiri, an old Portuguese fort on the west coast of India. The more forceful of his wives, a bloodthirsty woman called the Supayalat, was known to the British soldiery as Soup-Plate.

and the bodyguards and the obsequies of princes—it was all a kind of charade. The Viceroy was only a temporary Civil Servant, on a five-year term, and would presently go home again. The rules of British India were inescapable, and exact. When a Viceroy sailed out to assume his dignities he was entitled to a grant of £3,500, to cover his travel expenses and equipment. When he returned to England at the end of his service he was allowed a ship of the Indian Marine as far as Suez, the limit of his power: but once there, he and his Vicereine were all on their own, could claim no more divine appurtenances, and must seek the help of Thomas Cook's for their onward travel, paying their own fares.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Consolations

Oh, I've seen a lot of girls, my boys, and drunk a lot of beer,
And I've met with some of both, my boys, as left me mighty queer,
But for beer to knock you sideways and girls to make you sigh,
You must camp at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

We camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai,
The road to Gundagai! Five miles from Gundagai!
Yes, we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

Australian Bush Song